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**GONG**
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PROG 145

YES 90125
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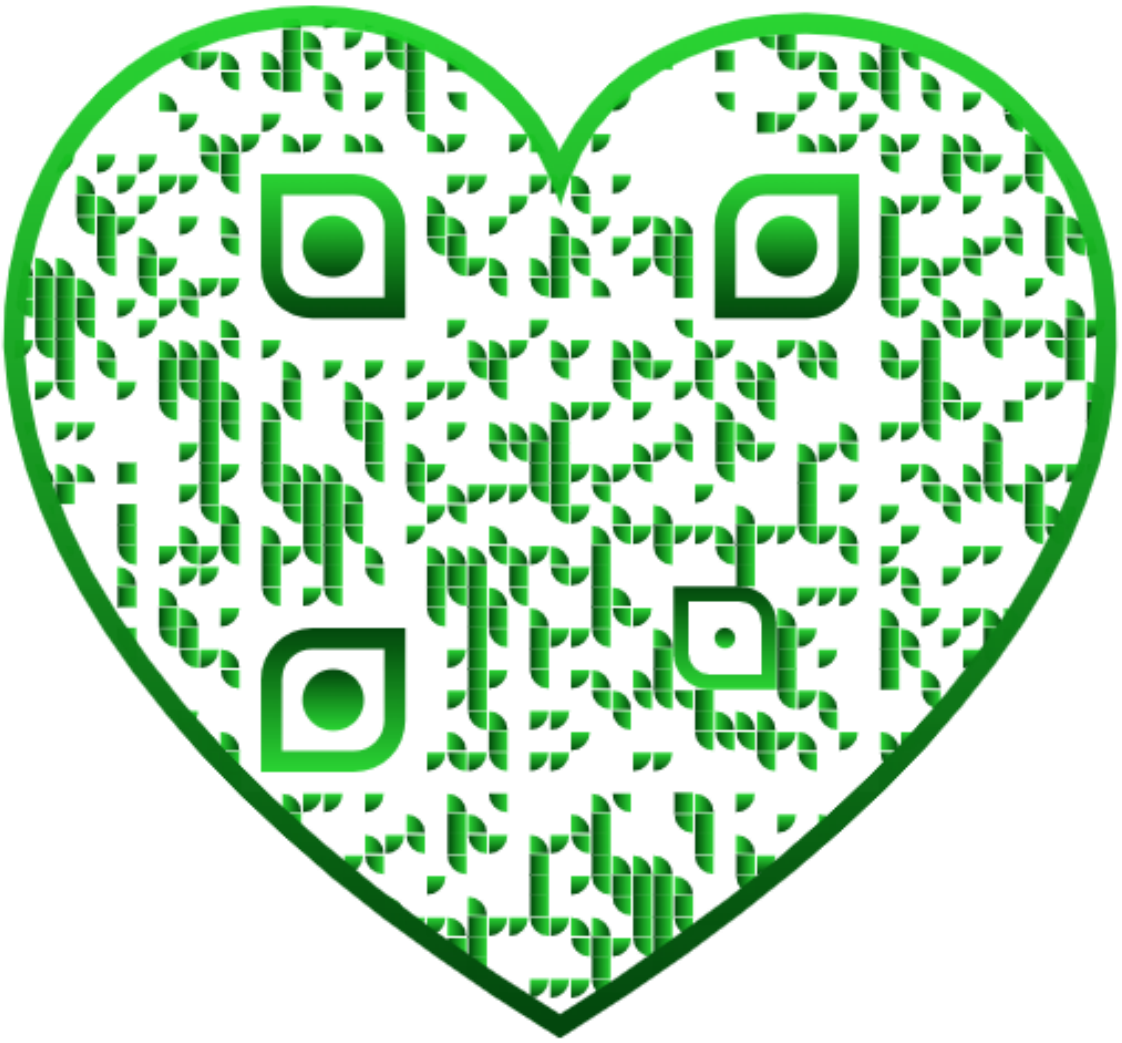

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# Steve Howe

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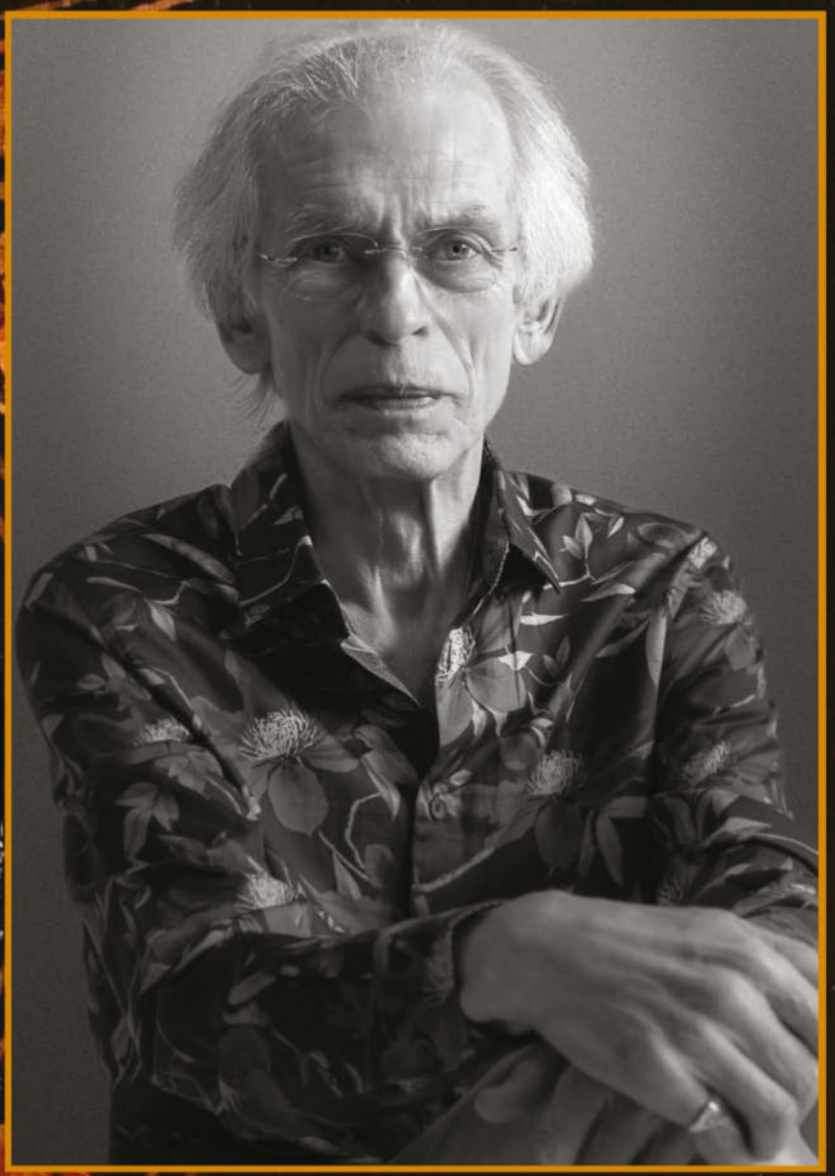

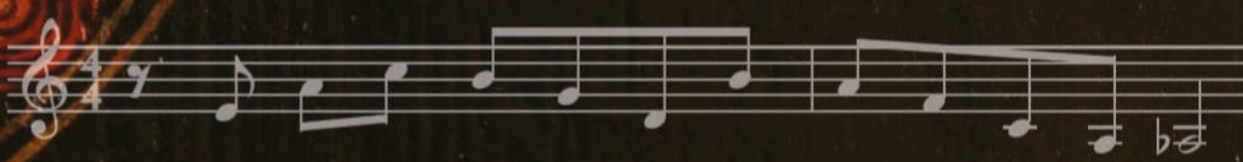

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ISSUE 145 24.11.23

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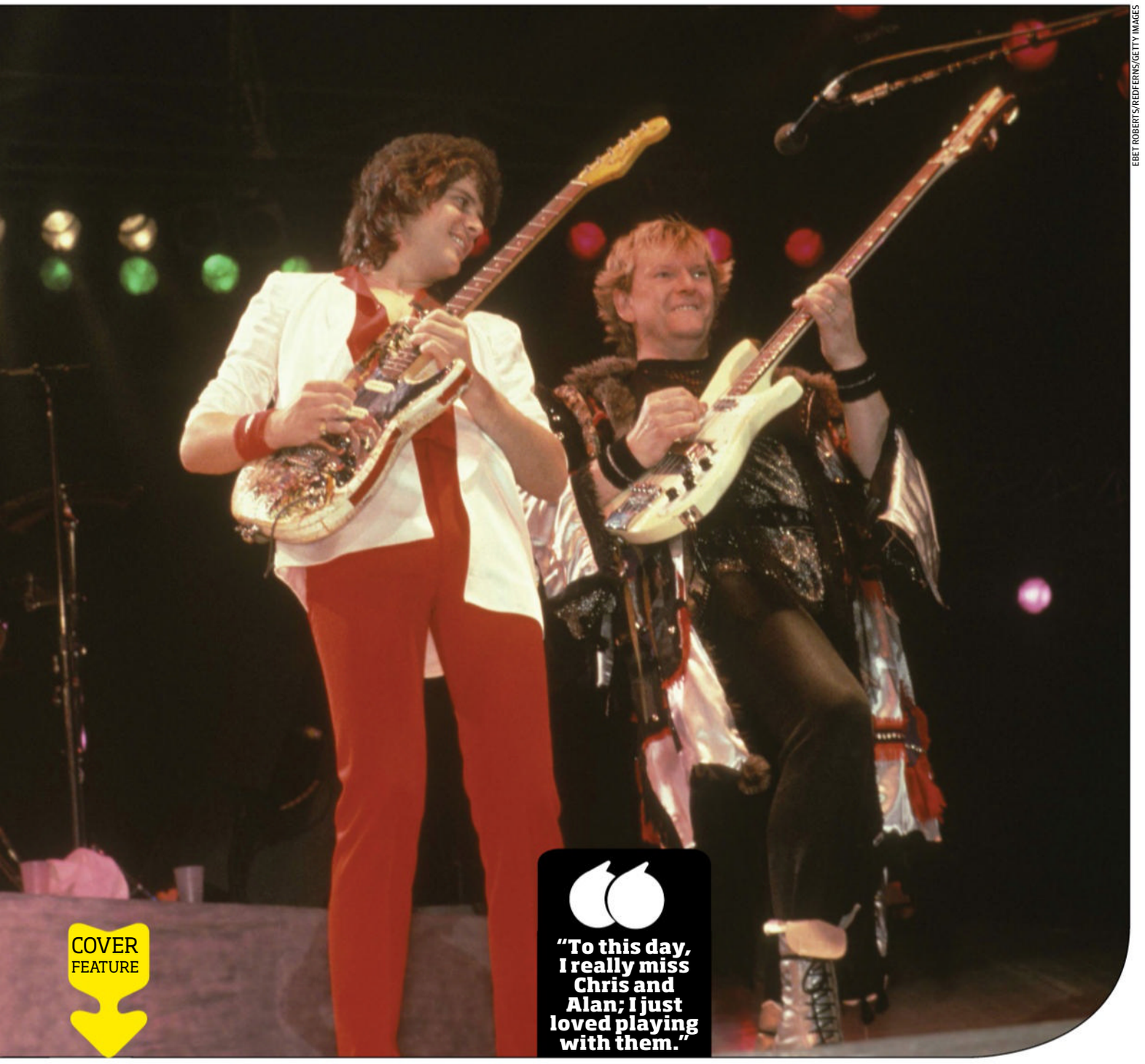

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

COVER FEATURE

"To this day, I really miss Chris and Alan; I just loved playing with them."

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How *90125* ushered in a new era for both Yes and progressive rock…

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PRESS/AL STUART

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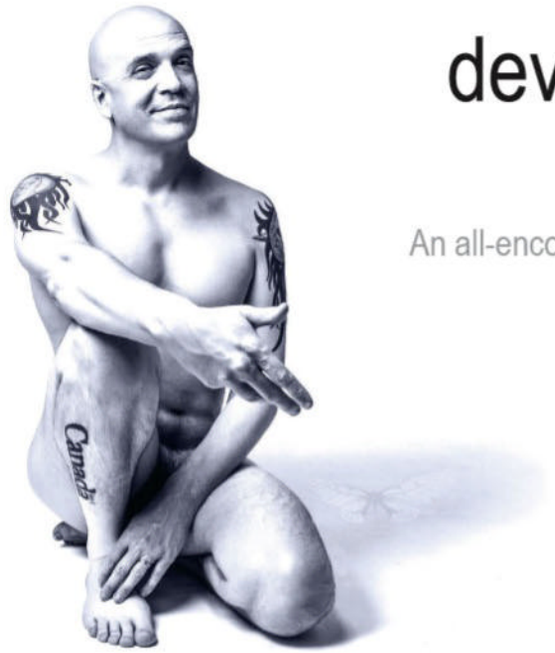
The Australian prog rockers introduce new singer Shaun Holton on current release, *Another World*.



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# Steve Hackett
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# PROG PRESENTS...

# Discovering

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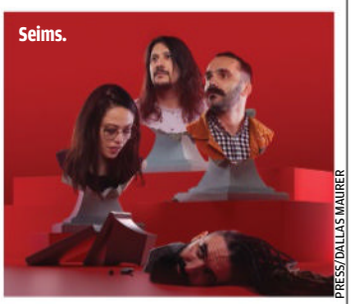
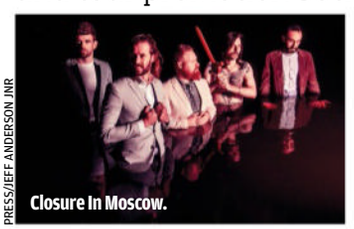


PRESS/DALLAS MAURER

Prog, post-rock, art-rock, pop-prog, jazz-metal, avant-garde, psych-rock, post-metal, electronica, chiptune, noise-rock, fusion, tech-rock, crescendo-core, new dirt and experimental rock are just some of the many descriptions used to define the music we enjoy and promote. The one thing it all has in common: it's music we like. Give it a listen and we hope you'll like it too.



PRESS/JEFF ANDERSON JNR

PRESS

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**1 Closure In Moscow**
***Better Way***
Taken from *Soft Hell*

**2 Toehider**
***He's There And Then He Does That***
Taken from *I Like It!*

**3 Sleepmakeswaves**
***Batavia***
Taken from *These Are Not Your Dreams*

**4 Arcane Promise (Part 2)**
Taken from *Known/Learned*

**5 We Lost The Sea**
***A Beautiful Collapse***
Taken from *Triumph & Disaster*

**6 Hemina**
***Strike Four (Single Version)***
Taken from *Romancing The Ether*

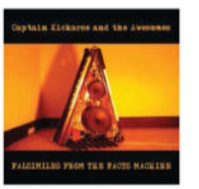
**7 Kodiak Empire**
***Animist***
Taken from *The Great Acceleration*

**8 Svntax Error**
***Broken Nightmares***
Taken from *The Vanishing Existence*

**9 Mushroom Giant**
***Earthrise***
Taken from *In A Forest*

**10 Pirate**
***B Minor***
Taken from *Pirate*

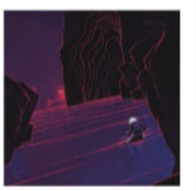
**11 Hence Confetti**
***New Homes***
Taken from *Hence Confetti*



**12 Captain Kickarse And The Awesomes**
***Always On Your Person***
Taken from *Falsimilies From The Facts Machine*

**13 Solkyri**
***Pendock And Progress***
Taken from *Mount Pleasant*

**14 Pluto Jonze**
***Awe***
Taken from *Awe*



**15 Meniscus**
***Simulation***
Taken from *Refractions*

**16 Clayhands**
***Godolphin***
Taken from *Is This Yes?*

**17 Tangled Thoughts Of Leaving**
***(Quakes)***
Taken from *Failed By Man And Machine*

**18 Seims**
***Elegance Over Confidence***
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# Ed's Letter

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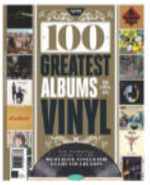


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SCAN HERE TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of *Prog*.

So, *90125* is 40 years old, then. And it seems like only yesterday that I was unwrapping a pristine vinyl copy on Christmas Day in 1983! True, the 80s was a turbulent time for some Yes fans, from seeing Buggles join the band for *Drama* to suddenly finding their prog heroes top the US singles charts. But, it was a necessary step in the evolution of the band as well as progressive music. Stephen Lambe's intriguing cover story, which starts with Chris Squire and Alan White jamming with Jimmy Page, charts the creation of the album as Yes became a major musical force once again. You'll find it on p28.

Elsewhere in this issue, Edgar Broughton discusses his eventful time as head of the Edgar Broughton Group and his first new solo album for more than a decade, Fish recalls the less-than-happy time creating his ninth solo album, *13th Star,* and Kavus Torabi explains how the new Gong album, *Unending Ascending*, is part of a new trilogy for the band.

Also in the issue, Bruce Soord, Tiger Moth Tales, Southern Empire, The Emerald Dawn, Christina Booth, Green Lung, Myrkur, Nick Fletcher and more bring us up to speed with their new releases.

I hope you enjoy the Rodney Matthews 2024 calendar that comes with this issue (UK retail and subscribers only). One of the brightest and most evocative UK artists, I've grown up with Rodney's work over the years and it was a real delight working with him and many of the iconic images, which I'm sure you'll all recognise. There's also the Bird's Robe Records sampler – download details on p7. They're a great Australian label who boast the likes of Sleepmakeswaves, Toehider, Hemina, Seims and Closure In Moscow, to name but a few of their great bands.

We're back on December 29 for the final issue of the year. Until then, stay safe and prog on...

**Jerry Ewing – Editor**

NEXT ISSUE DEC 29 ON SALE

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# Bloody Well Write

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## GONE BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN

Music can take the listener on emotional journeys, so I was delighted to see the article on my hero Keith Emerson in *Prog* 144. It was fascinating to see the 30 tracks chosen by fans, family and friends. There were no major surprises, but for me there were three significant absences from the list that, in my humble opinion, I would like to have seen included.

It is solely through ELP and The Nice that my interest in classical music was born and the *Five Bridges* album is one of my all-time favourites. Is there anything that screams prog as much as that opening suite, with the band playing alongside the orchestra, fusing classical, rock and jazz, to produce 20 minutes of epic, exhilarating music? And no *Lucky Man*! With what was surely the first-ever recorded synthesiser solo, that introduced us mere mortals to the weird, wonderful, and unlimited sounds of the Moog, which Keith had been at the forefront [of] in its formative years.

Finally, I would include *Honky Tonk Train Blues*, just to share the sheer fun and exuberance of a master pianist. There's rarely a day I don't think of Keith, so it was reassuring to read Rick Wakeman's statement that "people will still be discovering Keith's music in a 100 years' time". I hope so. Oh, how I love and miss you, Keith Emerson.

***Sam Palmer, via email***

***Prog* 144 with the late Keith Emerson on the cover.**

**Emerson: a musical genius who brought joy to so many of our readers.**

BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

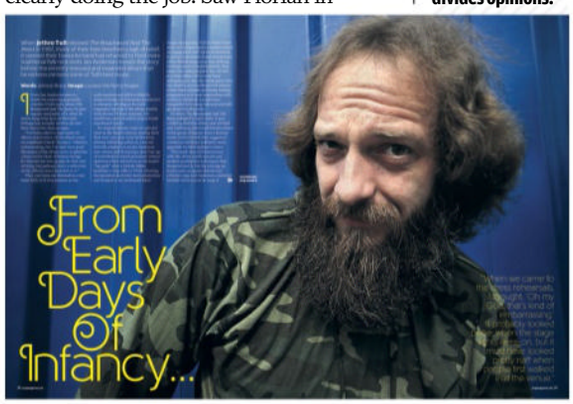
## ONE FINAL GLIMPSE?

As a long-time fan of Jethro Tull, I enjoyed the story on *The Broadsword And The Beast* anniversary edition [*Prog* 143]. Bought the box set and enjoyed all of it, especially the Steven Wilson remixes. Beautiful packaging as usual and great bonus tracks.

Now, there's one thing I want to bring up and I think it needs to be taken care of while the protagonists are still young enough: Ian needs to reintegrate Martin Barre in the band. The last few guitar players in Tull are really good and are clearly doing the job. Saw Florian in Montreal a few years back and he could certainly play guitar. But, Tull is Martin Barre and Ian Anderson. Simple as that and to deny the fans the joy of seeing them both on the same stage is simply not right.

Get along, boys. Figure out your differences and give us one last glimpse of the fabulous team you were.

***Mario Lefebvre, Montreal, Canada***




**Our feature on *The Broadsword And The Beast* – an album that still divides opinions!**

## A BEAST TOO FAR

The 40th anniversary (Monster Edition) of Tull's *The Broadsword And The Beast* is just another example of record companies (or indeed the songwriters) extorting money from record-buying fans like myself and countless other older fans.

This particular 'book' set is the most expensive by far (yes, I know there are eight discs and an extensive book – although you need a magnifying glass for us seniors to be able to read said text) yet it could easily have been less bulky and cheaper. Many of the extra tracks included have appeared elsewhere, and any true fan would have these, some more than once. (And let's face it these 'box' additions are targeted to a particular fan. Your casual record buyer is certainly not going to spend the sum asked for, for these sets.)

Discs four and five were of a concert(s) in Germany and, again, the majority of this appears on *Hard Times Of Old England* released in 2021 (albeit on a different label). It can be argued that these are 'bootleg' recordings but they are being sold through [record stores]. This is not the first time this has happened and it will again if the 'book' editions continue with *Under Wraps*.

Many thanks for the great pieces on Keith Emerson in *Prog* 144.

As a kid his music helped me to bond with my dad, especially during the family misery and chaos of two warring parents, soon to be divorced. But Dad was impressed when he heard the classical refrains as I played *Five Bridges* and *Elegy* by The Nice. It led to simple, happy times, together, discussing music. With all the bitterness raging in the home, those moments became an oasis of calm and joy.

One of the posters on my wall was of Emerson, one hand raised above a beloved, if somewhat battered, Hammond organ. However much I loved Hendrix, Emerson was the man.

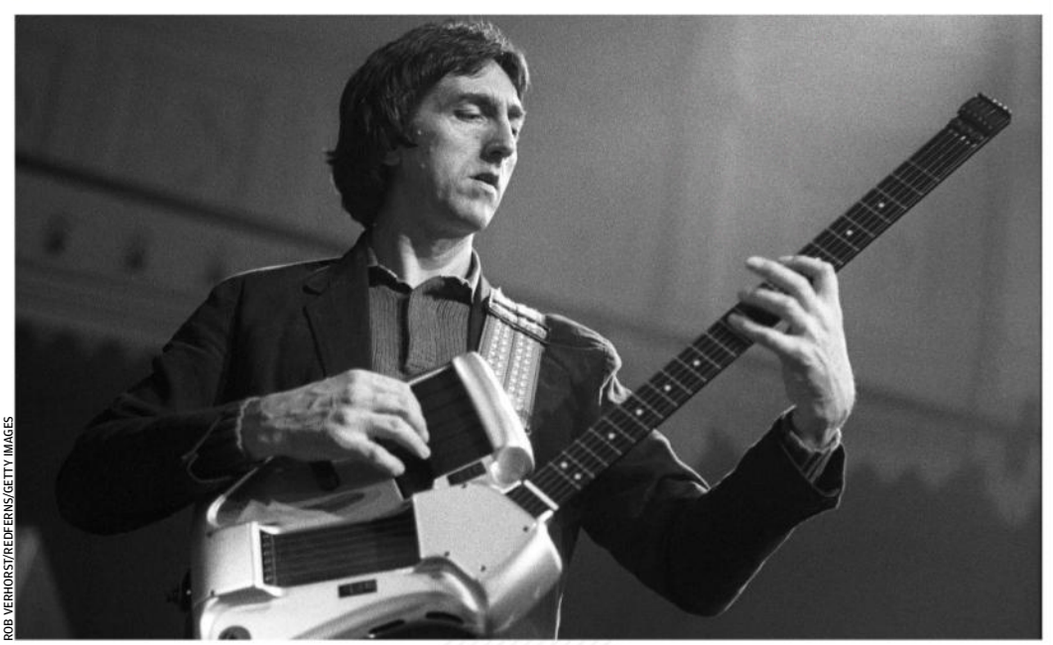
Then I eagerly bought the ELP debut album, with my hard-earned pocket money, and grabbed each successive studio album as they were released. I remember playing the floppy vinyl sampler of *Brain Salad Surgery* that came free with *NME* just a week before the album's release.

In his excellent article, Rick Wakeman notes that, despite his other fine skills around music, it was playing that always came first. Therefore, the neurological problems hit him especially hard. It dogged him through his later career and made playing at a virtuoso level increasingly difficult, triggering bouts of depression. It seems this eventually led to his sad and brutal end.

He was an exceptional keyboardist who loved to entertain with his hair-raising, breathtaking playing. This is what he was put on Earth to do. He was a one-off original, setting his standards at a level few others could reach. When he felt no longer able to achieve this, then, for him, it seemed to challenge his whole reason for existence. Sometimes there is a terrible and tragic price exacted on a person of genius.

***Nigel Leaney, Reading***

*This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag* from burningshed.com *Contents may vary*



ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

**Innovative guitarist, Allan Holdsworth.**

The three DVDs could have been replaced with one Blu-ray! And why no visuals?

Having said all this it's a million times superior to the rubbish disguised as prog, I'm referring to *The Zealot Gene* and *RökFlöte*. The former only did as well as it did because fools like me thought, after all these years, that we were going to get an incredible album. How wrong could we be? It's very short too, obviously geared to the album market, but you would have thought after so long Ian Anderson could have made it at least an hour — but can you imagine an hour of that? And to top it all, after a year (if that) he did it again! They should have been solo outings and not under the banner of Tull. And why oh why doesn't he get someone else to sing? It means when he goes to the big gig in the sky Tull will be no more, he should take a leaf out of Yes' book.

***Martin Willgrass (a lifetime fan of Jethro Tull since 1968), via email***

## TRUE VISIONARY

I'm writing to encourage *Prog* to do a cover story on Allan Holdsworth. The anniversary of his death (April 15, 2017) came and went last year with no tributes from any of the major music periodicals. His musicianship speaks volumes and, excuse the pun, volumes could well be written about his technique alone (not to mention his innovative chordal playing).

He played with some of the most well-known and seminal prog and fusion bands (Soft Machine, Gong, UK, Bruford, Tony Williams, etc.) and in addition Allan was probably the most down-to-earth guy (I met him at BB King's nightclub in NYC back in 2005) and stayed true to his musical vision right up until the day he passed.

***Marc C, via email***

*Thanks for your email, Marc. We're big Holdsworth fans here so we'll definitely keep this in mind. — Dep. Ed.*

PROG

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# INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

# STEVE HACKETT GETS CONCEPTUAL

Almost 40 years since his last concept album, the celebrated guitarist's new album draws inspiration from his own early years.

**Steve Hackett is** to release *The Circus And The Nightwhale* on February 16 via InsideOutMusic. It's his first full-blown concept album since his 1975 solo debut, *The Voyage Of The Acolyte*, and the narrative, which is based on the rites of passage and adventures of a character named Travla, is, to all intents and purposes, autobiographical.

"It starts off in 1950 and then it's a travel through time and personal experiences," Hackett explains. "Lyrically it's a description of my first impressions of the world, and then certain characters that I met. But then it moves into more and more fantastic and imagined situations."

Hackett rates Genesis' narrative concept album *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* as "one of the finest prog rock albums of all time", and plans to play highlights live in 2024. However, he

And then there was me: Steve Hackett draws on his own experiences for his new album.

**"I'm still in love with the sound of the guitar and the potential of where it can go."**

says the trials and tribulations of its protagonist, Rael, had little or no influence on the unfolding story of *The Circus And The Nightwhale*.

"I've got to do what comes naturally and it's better not to start off with a concept than commission yourself from the word go," he explains. "If you're playing from the heart or just having fun, you've got a better chance of doing something that's honest. And then maybe, one or two tracks in, you realise where you're headed."

The lyrics are co-written by Hackett's wife and long-time collaborator, Jo.

"Having a narrative stretches you," he says. "It takes you outside your comfort zone, and you're also having to come up with a score for a 'film for the ear' to bring the lyric to life."

*The Circus And The Nightwhale* took two years to record between touring commitments and features Hackett's regular band, plus Amanda Lehmann on vocals, John Hackett on flute, guest drummer Nick D'Virgilio and Malik Mansurov on the tar. "There are some extraordinary performances," Hackett says.

As a time-travelling journey, the album incorporates a number of different musical styles beginning with an evocation of the post-war era, when, as Hackett says, "the world was in chaos, but [culturally] it was still being controlled, so I wanted to get that feeling across where rock'n'roll literally had to burst out.

"John Lennon said he thought that Genesis were true sons of The Beatles," Hackett adds, and he identifies their influence on the album: "I think music was never the same after *Sgt. Pepper's...* , and it comes into my mind with the idea of trying to get all these eras of song together on one album."

*Enter The Ring* features sections of 12-string guitar, with vocal harmonies between himself and Lehmann.

"There's a Genesis feel but it's taken onto another level," he explains. By contrast is the "rock noir" of *Get Me Out!* "There are lots of moments when the action hots up and I want to be able to do things at great speed, and Rob [Townsend] is doing extraordinary runs on sax. The album is very energised and full of great playing too."

Hackett uses effects and multi-tracking to increase the sonic possibilities of his guitar.

"And it does sound huge," he enthuses. "I know guitarists will like it."

Jeff Beck, whom he admired, passed away while Hackett was recording. "I kept thinking to myself, is this something he would have liked? Because he always managed to do the unusual," he says. He also notes that Beck said that he'd always tried to be "naughty" in his playing. "I'm still in love with the sound of the guitar and the potential of where it can go."

See www.hackettsongs.com for more information. **MB**

PRESS/TINA KORHONEN

**This month, Intro was compiled by**
Jeremy Allen
Mike Barnes
Dave Everley
Jerry Ewing
Cheri Faulkner
Stephen Lambe
Rhodri Marsden
Julian Marszalek
James McNair
Matt Mills
Natasha Scharf
Phil Weller

# PORCUPINE TREE RELEASE LIVE SET

*Closure/Continuation Live* captures 2022 Dutch show in variety of formats.

PRESS/CARL GLOVER

Porcupine Tree's live celebration is to be released.

**Porcupine Tree's surprise** comeback album, 2022's *Closure/Continuation*, is being followed up by a new DVD/Blu-ray recording of the subsequent tour.

*Closure/Continuation Live*, filmed at Amsterdam's 17,000-capacity Ziggo Dome on November 7, 2022, will be released on December 6 via Music For Nations. Available on CD/Blu-ray, a CD/Blu-Ray box set and four-LP vinyl editions, the 21-track set features every song from the recent album, plus such classics as *Blackest Eyes*, *Fear Of A Blank Planet* and *Trains*.

"The first night of the tour in Toronto, the audience just went berserk when we walked onstage," says drummer Gavin Harrison. "They cheered for five minutes before we even played a note."

The tour saw the band playing their biggest-ever UK headlining show at Wembley Arena.

"I always thought if we came back, we'd do Wembley or the O2 rather than four or five nights at the Hammersmith Apollo," says keyboardist Richard Barbieri. "We were looking at the O2, but it wasn't available."

The success of *Closure/Continuation* raises the question of whether Porcupine Tree have plans for another album or tour.

"We're not averse to the idea," comments Harrison, "but we haven't got any plans."

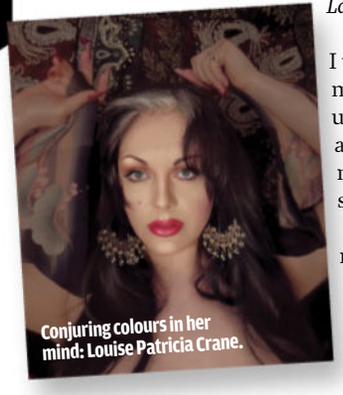
"We wouldn't just go out and do the same thing over and over again," adds Barbieri. "It would depend on whether we had new music. Are we writing new music? No."

See www.porcupinetree.com for more information. **DEV**

# LOUISE PATRICIA CRANE SINGLE HERALDS ALBUM

Covers of King Crimson and Johnny Winter lead the way.

**Enigmatic Northern Irish** singer-songwriter Louise Patricia Crane has released a new digital double A-side in the shape of her versions of King Crimson's *Ladies Of The Road* and Johnny Winter's *Dirty*. Available via streaming and download platforms, it marks her first new material since the release of her debut album, *Deep Blue*, in 2020. The tracks feature musical contributions from Jakko Jakszyk and Mel Collins, the latter of whom played on the original version of *Ladies Of The Road* in 1971.



Conjuring colours in her mind: Louise Patricia Crane.

PRESS/OLIVIA BEST

Speaking of *Dirty*, Crane says, "This is a song I wish I'd written. It conjures up colours in my mind. It spoke to me most because it was uncharacteristically dreamy. Lyrically it felt sensual and dark; amusingly so... grim fantasies of murdering one's spouse — but ultimately of stark self-reflection; it got under my skin."

Louise Patricia Crane's second, as yet untitled, new album is scheduled for release in the spring.

See www.louisepatriciacrane.com. **JM**

# PALLAS ARE BACK WITH NEW ALBUM

Reunited with singer Alan Reed, new LP *The Messenger* is "their darkest album yet."

Pallas are back to chronicle the darkness of the world.

PRESS/PAUL MACKIE

**Scottish neo-proggers** Pallas caused much furore when Alan Reed, who fronted the band between 1986 and 2005, announced his return to the fold in February. Now the band, reacting to the darkness of recent times, will release their eighth album, *The Messenger*, on December 15. Written and recorded across continents, with guitarist Niall Mathewson having relocated to Cambodia, it's described by Reed as "the album of our careers".

Reed replaced original singer Euan Lowson and spearheaded the band across four albums, including 1986's seminal *The Wedge*, before parting ways after 2005's *Dreams Of Men*. While he says his return to the band has been "a surprise to me as much as anybody else," the singer reveals it was the quality of their early demos that enticed him into the reunion.

"If I hadn't felt it was good quality music, I would not have been involved," he states, matter-of-factly.

"I'd heard the previous two albums they'd done without me and I didn't find them cohesive. When I heard the demos for this album, I went from healthy sceptic to fully positive; it sounded like Pallas again."

Of its origins, Mathewson says: "I originally started writing for the album about four years ago. It started very upbeat, but during Covid, from my perspective, everything changed and would never be the same again, so my writing took a darker turn. Now the album is more about mortality, death and responsibility."

It's resulted in what Reed defines as "Pallas' darkest album to date; and they're all pretty dark!"

He adds, "They're a band that attracted me in the first place, as a fan, for being very dark. Pallas has always had one foot in the real world and on this album we've found a way of doing that better than ever before. There was a common resolve to get our shit together and say something about the state of the world."

**"There was a common resolve to say something about the state of the world."**

While future live performances are unlikely, Mathewson confirms that a follow-up "is mostly written".

*The Messenger* will be available as a Digipak CD and a special-edition 36-page Digibook.

"I'm very proud to be part of this album and to be back in the band," Reed concludes. "It's a wonderful thing to be involved with." **POW**

*For more information and music, visit www.pallasofficial.bandcamp.com.*

## INTRO extras

### ATOM HEART SPECIAL INCOMING

**Pink Floyd have** announced the release of a special edition of their 1970 album *Atom Heart Mother* – the band's first-ever No.1 album – through Pink Floyd Records on December 8. The reissue, originally released in Japan in 2021, features footage of the *Atom Heart Mother* suite performed at the Hakone Aphrodite Festival in 1971. For more visit www.pinkfloyd.com.

Cast of thousands: Elbow gear up for a very busy 2024.

PRESS

# NEW ALBUM AND TOUR FROM ELBOW

Expect some "very big songs" that have been written with arenas in mind.

**With Elbow set** to return with a brand-new, as yet untitled album and a seven-date arena tour next year, frontman Guy Garvey has admitted that the new record – the band's 10th – has been written specifically with large venues in mind.

"It's hard not to," says Garvey. "We haven't played very much in the last few years. Because of Covid and the intimate nature of the last album, *Flying Dream 1*, we just decided to have a year off to hang out with our families for a bit. So in making the record we have, without even discussing it, had these shows in mind."

While one of the songs has been inspired by their experience of supporting Foo Fighters ("real gentlemen") in front of 90,000 Mexican fans, others have very different influences.

"There's brevity with this album," reveals Garvey. "There's nothing over five minutes, but the songs are big and they're groovy. It's got everything from Meters-like back alley moves to some pretty hectic, almost Afrika Bambaataa-style grooves across it. And then in other places, I sound a little bit like Peter Gabriel. It's all over the shop!"

He adds, "The last record was so considered and this couldn't be more different, really."

Elbow take to the road in May 2024 to play Brighton Centre (7), London The O2 (9), Birmingham Resorts World Arena (10), Glasgow OVO Hydro (11), Leeds First Direct Arena (12), Manchester Co-op Live (14) and Nottingham Motorpoint Arena (15).

See www.elbow.co.uk for more information. **JM**

# CHELSEA WOLFE RETURNS WITH NEW STUDIO ALBUM

The mysterious singer is also set to play London in April.

**Darkly enigmatic musician** Chelsea Wolfe has announced she will release her latest album, *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She*, through Loma Vista Recordings on February 9.

Wolfe's seventh studio album and first for her new label represents a rebirth.

"It's a record about the past self reaching out to the present self reaching out to the future self to summon change, growth, and guidance," she explains. "It's a story of freeing yourself from situations and patterns that are holding you back in order to become self-empowered. It's an invitation to step into your authenticity."

The album follows the September release of single *Whispers In The Echo Chamber*. Wolfe will undertake a lengthy North American tour in support of the new album, but will venture over to the UK for a show at London's Heaven on April 21.

See www.chelseawolfe.com for more. **JE**

The empowered Chelsea Wolfe.

PRESS/EBRU YILDIZ

# NEW RELEASES

## PETER HAMMILL
### 'IN A FOREIGN TOWN/ OUT OF WATER 2023'
**(2CD EDITION)**

- This 2CD set features new reworkings of two of Peter's landmark albums originally released in 1988 and 1990 respectively. The uncertainty surrounding the rights of both these original albums prompted Hammill to revisit both works in the studio, reworking and re-recording whilst also using elements of the original material to stunning effect. The finished results are remarkable and demonstrate the strength of the original compositions. No longer destined to be viewed as "a product of their time", these new 2023 reworkings of 'In a Foreign Town' and 'Out of Water' can be seen as vital recordings in Peter Hammill's extensive body of work. Release Date 24th November 2023

EANTCD21102

## EDGAR BROUGHTON
### 'BREAK THE DARK'
**(CD EDITION)**

- This stunning record began life during the enforced COVID lockdown and evolved into a project that is truly special.
- The album features appearances by Edgar Broughton Band member Arthur Grant and cellist Calle Arngrip and has been mixed by the acclaimed producer and engineer John Leckie (who began his career as a Tape Operator on the first Edgar Broughton Band album 'Wasa Wasa'). 'Break The Dark' sees Edgar Broughton evolve his songwriting craft into something quite remarkable. It is a record which ranks as one of his most accomplished works. Release Date 27th October 2023

EANTCD1101

## FISH ON FRIDAY
### '8MM'
**(CD EDITION)**

- This is the band's sixth album and much anticipated follow up to the critically acclaimed 'Black Rain', features a line-up of Nick Beggs (bass and vocals), Frank van Bogaert (keyboards & vocals), Marty Townsend (guitars) and Marcus Weymaere (drums) and is the culmination of three years work. The sessions saw Nick Beggs assume the role of co-producer with Frank Van Bogaert.
- '8mm' is a fascinating collaboration between friends and kindred musical spirits and is their finest work to date. Release Date 27th October 2023

EANTCD1100

## BAKER GURVITZ ARMY
### 'LIVE 1975'
**(CD EDITION)**

- New remastered and expanded release of this live recording by Baker Gurvitz Army from 1975.
- With fully restored artwork and a new essay.
- This archive release was recorded on the band's first UK tour as a five piece band in 1975 and features outstanding versions of tracks such as 'People', 'Memory Lane', 'Wotever It Is' and 'Freedom' (written by Jimi Hendrix).
- Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLEC2849

## NEKTAR
### 'REMEMBER THE FUTURE'
**(4CD/BLU-RAY BOX SET)**

- This 50th Anniversary edition comprises 4 CDs and a multi-region Blu Ray disc and features a newly remastered original stereo mix of the album along with and additional two CDs featuring a previously unreleased concert recorded at the Stadthalle, Munster, Germany in January 1974 and stunning new 5.1 Surround Sound and Stereo mixes of the album from the original multi track tapes.
- Also included on the Blu ray disc are the original 1973 Quad mix and additional video content comprising of the rare 'Remember the Future' promotional film, the film of 'Wings' shown on BBC TVs Old Grey Whistle Test and a live performance of 'Desolation Valley / Waves' for the same TV show. Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLEC52846

## THE MOVE
### 'SHAZAM!'
**(REMASTERED VINYL EDITION)**

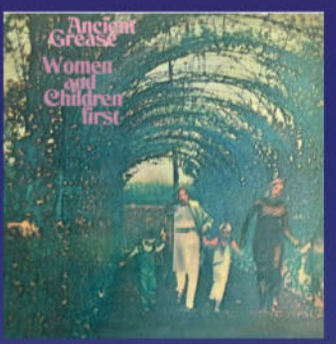
- Of all of the groups to emerge in Britain in the latter half of the 1960s, The Move was arguably one of the finest. A powerful act on stage, the group were blessed with one of the most imaginative songwriters of his generation in Roy Wood. 'Shazam' is regarded by many as the finest Move album, despite being recorded in a time of flux for the band. It is rightly regarded as a true classic of the era.
- This new vinyl LP edition of 'Shazam' has been cut at Abbey Road Studios and fully restores the original LP artwork.
- Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLECLP2538

## ARTHUR BROWN
### 'DANCE'
**(EXPANDED AND REMASTERED CD EDITION)**

- Unavailable for some years, this new Esoteric Recordings' edition has been newly remastered and expanded to include six previously unreleased bonus tracks, recorded by Arthur Brown and his band for the BBC radio In Concert series in April 1975.
- The release also features an illustrated booklet with new notes. Release Date 27th October 2023

ECLEC2847




## ANCIENT GREASE
### 'WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST'
**(CD EDITION)**

- Featuring a wonderful blend of powerful psychedelic and progressive rock, the album was issued on Mercury in July 1970. Although it failed to make a commercial impression upon its release, the album is now highly sought after by collectors and fans of the Welsh rock scene and Man aficionados.
- This Esoteric Recordings edition has been remastered from the recently located original master tapes for the very first time, (previous releases having been taken from vinyl), and presents this legendary album in the best ever sound quality.
- Release Date 24th November 2023

ECLEC2851

# CALIGULA'S HORSE COME RIDING BACK

*Charcoal Grace* is the Australian band's first album of new material in four years.

Caligula's Horse are to return with a new album.

PRESS/JACK VENABLES

**Australian prog rockers** Caligula's Horse have announced their first album in four years. *Charcoal Grace* will come out on January 24 via InsideOutMusic. The nine-song, hour-long LP will be a more progressive effort than 2020 predecessor, *Rise Radiant*, with a loose concept related to the band's experiences during the pandemic. Lead single *Golem* is currently available to watch on YouTube and via streaming services.

"We jokingly refer to *Charcoal Grace* as, 'What did we learn in the pandemic?'" guitarist, composer and co-founder Sam Vallen tells *Prog*. "There's a continual thread of that throughout the record. Either it's looking out and seeing things you hoped you wouldn't see in society, like the people who immediately became 100 per cent individualist, or looking internally. How do you be an artist in this world and interact with it in a creative sense?"

*Charcoal Grace* is bookended by 10-minute *The World Breathes With Me* and 12-minute *Mute*, while the title track itself is the band's longest song to date. Split into four parts, it clocks in at a total of 24 minutes, with lyrics that explore the themes of child abuse and forgiveness.

"Those elements are more implied than directly stated," says Vallen. "The cliché in western culture is that forgiving is always good, and [the title track] is an exploration of that idea: for someone who's had a horrible experience with a parent, there's a lot of subtext to that. There's an extended metaphor there, as well, for the pandemic, especially for some of the ways people experienced relationships within the pandemic."

Caligula's Horse will support the release of *Charcoal Grace* with a run of North American shows, which commence in Washington DC, on January 31. The 19-date tour will continue through the US and Canada before finishing in Vancouver on February 25. Vallen states that he hopes the touring cycle for the album will continue to be prolific throughout the rest of the year as well.

"We've got a bunch of new, really amazing people that we're working with," he says, "and right now, we're staring down the barrel of 2024 being a really full year of touring. I don't know exactly when we're going to be announcing some of this stuff, but we're going to be busy. It'll be like the old days [before the pandemic] again!" **MM**

**"We're staring down the barrel of 2024 being a really full year of touring."**

*See www.caligulashorse.com for more information and news.*

## INTRO extras

### HAWKWIND TO REISSUE 80S SINGLE

**Venerable space rock** institution Hawkwind are set to re-release their live 1980 single, *Shot Down In The Night* on December 1 via Atomhenge. Reformatted on 10-inch yellow vinyl that plays at 45rpm, it comes packaged in fully restored artwork. And, as with the original single, the B-side is the live version of long-time favourite *Urban Guerilla*. See www.hawkwind.com for more.

No-Man: the big hair years.

PRESS

# NO-MAN ANNOUNCE BOX SET OVERVIEW

The early years of the Steven Wilson and Tim Bowness band are lavishly curated.

**Steven Wilson's expanding** legion of fans are set to be spoiled for choice with the release of No-Man's CD box set, *Housekeeping: The Oli Years, 1990–1994*, which is out January 26 via One Little Independent Records.

Containing the band's first two albums, *Loveblows & Lovecries* (1993) and *Flowermouth* (1994), the deluxe five-CD box set is augmented by 1992's singles compilation, *Lovesighs* as well as *Radio Sessions 1992–94*, which includes specially recorded versions of *Break Heaven*, *Housekeeping* and *Heartcheat Pop* for then-Radio 1 DJ Nicky Campbell as well as *Days In The Trees* and *Lovecry* for Greater London Radio among others. The set's fifth disc, *Swagger*, reveals a different side to No-Man. Chronicling the period between the band's first studio experiments and just prior to being signed in 1991, the collection contains six unreleased songs as well as early versions of *Flowermouth*, *Swirl* and *Bleed*.

Formed in 1987 by multi-instrumentalist Steven Wilson and singer Tim Bowness, the band's line-up also included violinist Ben Coleman and contributors to their albums reads like a 'who's who' of prog. These include bassist Colin Edwin, drummers Chris Maitland and Gavin Harrison and keyboardist Richard Barbieri of Porcupine Tree, as well as King Crimson's Robert Fripp, drummer Pat Mastelotto and saxophone player Mel Collins, while electronic artist Roger Eno and Dead Can Dance singer Lisa Gerrard also get a look in.

See www.no-man.co.uk for more information. **JM**

# STORM DEVA ANNOUNCE SELF-TITLED DEBUT ALBUM

The duo catch lightning in a bottle for a December release.

**Up-and-coming proggers Storm** Deva have announced the release of their eponymous album via Storm Deva Records via Bandcamp on December 1. Headed by singer, pianist and composer Carollyn Eden and multi-instrumentalist Stuart Clark, the duo are joined on the record by cellist Hannah Reeves, drummer Robert Brian and Dan Giles on bass guitar.

Blending their love of rock, classical music, folk and world influences, the band say that the album's nine songs "range from the intimate to the epic", with guitarist Stuart Clark adding fondly of his musical partner, "Carollyn's gift is her ability to take the listener to the very heart of the moment that has inspired her."

Eden is equally effusive of Clark: "Stuart responds to music viscerally and his ability to connect to a song's heart and its every detail is a joy to experience."

See www.stormdeva.com for more information and to pre-order. **JM**

Storm Deva: gale-force prog coming your way.

PRESS/CJANSENPHOTOGRAPHY

# FAD GADGETS

**Rhodri Marsden** on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

### MEZE AUDIO 109 PRO PRIMAL

The Romans said "festina lente", the Greeks "speûde bradéōs", the British "more haste less speed" (or, more commonly, "don't screw it up"). The motto of Romanian audio firm Meze is "Graba strică treaba", which means the same thing, and gives some indication of their diligent approach toward making high-end audio products.

I'm a sucker for tech embedded in wooden enclosures crafted by artisans in the foothills of the Gutâi Mountains, so if you could grab those walnut earcups anointed with linseed oil and get them on my head, that would be great. Ta!

**www.mezeaudio.com**

### SOUNDBOKS 4

Bluetooth speakers are ten a penny these days, but none of them are as monstrously huge and powerful as the range made by Soundboks. I vaguely remember dismissing these gargantuan things as a novelty in the past, but their commitment to the cause is wholehearted, so I'm having to reevaluate. These things can pump out sound at 126db for six hours (quite an achievement, if sonically exhausting) but as well as Bluetooth connectivity they also have a "pro panel" with XLR inputs, allowing them to double as mini PA speakers for small gigs.

**www.soundboks.com**

### WOOVEBOX

If, in the Middle Ages, you'd have walked to the town square and announced to the milling throng that you owned a pocket-sized device weighing just 68 grams that was capable of slicing and chopping samples, arranging them using a 16-step sequencer and manipulating them with various filters and effects, you'd have been quickly marched off and then burned at the stake. Fortunately it's 2023, so the only thing you really have to worry about is how long the Woovebox's battery lasts (10 hours, apparently).

**www.woovebox.com**

# MY PROG HERO

## Inspiring the wider music world...

Just like heaven: Can inspired the young Lol Tolhurst to get playing.

PRESS/SPOON RECORDS

PRESS

# LOL TOLHURST

The Cure's co-founder and ex-drummer recalls being blown away by **ELP** and how krautrock pioneers **Can** gave him permission to play.

**"The second band** I ever saw was King Crimson. It was a free concert in Hyde Park in 1971. I was about 12 or 13. I always remember King Crimson because I'd just discovered *In The Court Of The Crimson King*. That's where things went a bit further because I liked Greg Lake's singing, and so my first indoor concert was ELP at the Empire Pool, Wembley.

Fast-forward 45 years: Keith Emerson lived in my neighbourhood in LA. It would've blown my teenage mind to think that I would be going to have Sunday lunch regularly with my old hero. Deep Purple's Glenn Hughes had introduced us. I told him about seeing ELP at Wembley and he told me that his son's favourite band was The Cure. And I'm like, 'Wow! Full circle!'

I used to go to the Croydon Greyhound regularly because it was easy to get the train from Crawley and be there in about 30 minutes. Every Sunday we'd go and see whoever was playing. I must have seen Stray about 800 times; they seemed to be on every other week there! But Can were on one time and it was great. It was in 1975 and I was 16. I had no idea who they were at all, but looking back, they were everything that you'd imagine them to be.

I'm sure that I saw them with [The Cure's original bassist] Michael Dempsey and it was the start of permission for things. We'd see all these really highly polished bands who were so far away from what I thought I could ever do. The Cure had just started playing but when we saw Can, I thought they did what we did in our rehearsals; they sort of jiggled around for a while until someone found something and took hold of it and the rest went, 'Okay! Great!' Can were more sophisticated, obviously, but it wasn't that far away from our own experience and that was definitely the link.

Jaki Liebezeit's drumming was incredible and he said that you have to 'play monotonous.' I got it; I'd be listening to a 10-minute track and he's playing the same thing but he's inside of it and that was the connection for me!" **JM**

**"Can was the start of permission of things for The Cure and that was the link."**

*Los Angeles by Lol Tolhurst x Budgie x Jacknife Lee is out now on PIAS. For more info see www.facebook.com/loltolhurstxbudgiexjacknifelee.*

# PROG IN BRIEF

Australian prog guitar virtuoso **Plini** (right) has announced the release of his new EP, *Mirage*, on December 1. The five-track also features a guest appearance from **Animals As Leaders** leader **Tosin Abasi**. For more info see www.plini.co.

Prog veterans **Nektar** are to get the reissue treatment when their 1973 classic, *Remember The Future*, is released as a four-CD/Blu-ray box set via Esoteric on November 24. Rare live footage is included. Info at www.nektarsmusic.com.

Dutch lute player, composer and sometime Jim Jarmusch collaborator **Jozef van Wissem** releases his new album *The Night Dwells In The Day* via Incunabulum Records on January 19. For more information, go to www.jozefvanwissem.com.

kscope

# MARIUSZ DUDA
# AFR AI D OUT NOW

**Riverside / Lunatic Soul creative force Mariusz Duda continues his electronic path initiated by his Lockdown Trilogy.**

Limited edition magenta LP / LP / CD / digital

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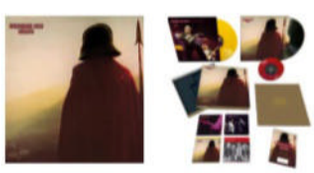

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PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
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PRESS/DIE FRAU

Skáld promise to provide ethereal, medieval folk vibes.

# SKÁLD

French prog-folk collective take Nordic mythology on a vibrant sonic adventure.

**CHRISTOPHE VOISIN-BOISVINET** spent his childhood in the Loire Valley in central-western France: a stunning, rural region defined by its series of sky-piercing castles. So it really shouldn't be a surprise that he grew up to be the multi-instrumentalist of a historical progressive folk collective.

"As a child, I was introverted and surrounded by these medieval ruins and fortresses," the mastermind behind Skáld tells *Prog* — or, more specifically, his interpreter tells *Prog*, since he speaks in French. "I used to play in these special places a lot by myself. My parents say that I'd always ask things like, 'Why don't we tell stories about our past? What were things like before?' So I've always had a link with medieval culture. I think that's the time when I also got into music."

A number of the castles that line the Loire Valley were built in the Middle Ages with the goal of fending off the Vikings and Normans invading France. However, the Nordic culture lives on in the country through Voisin-Boisvinet and his songs. Skáld's most recent album, *Huldufólk*, is dedicated to the folkloric "secret people": supernatural beings that are similar to humans, yet invisible.

"In Iceland, the huldufólk exist as a cultural phenomenon," Voisin-Boisvinet explains, "but it's become quite cutesy, with lots of different elves and trolls. I wanted to distance myself from that and focus on what we, now, don't or can't see. I think people used to be able to see a space where nature and divinity came together, so I've dedicated this record to that aspect of the huldufólk."

## PROG FILE

**LINE-UP**

**Christophe Voisin-Boisvinet** *(percussion, horn, keyboards, programming)*; **Ravn** *(talharpa, moraharpa, gudok)*; **Nicolas Montazaud** *(percussion)*; **Aliocha Regnard** *(nyckelharpa)*; **Laetitia Marcangeli**, **Marti Ilmar Uibo**, **Michel Abraham**, **Adeline Bellart**, **Steeve Petit**, **Julien Loko**, **Lily Jung**, **Kohann** *(vocals)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

A time capsule to the Middle Ages, built out of ancient percussion and mystical vocals

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*Huldúfolk* is out now via U Music

**WEBSITE**

www.bio.to/skald

Voisin-Boisvinet and his band, which on the album includes three other musicians and eight vocalists, pay tribute with aptly ethereal-sounding but percussion-led folk. Although Skáld's leader says the songs are artistic imaginings and not necessarily replicas of age-old melodies, the likes of *Troll Kalla Mik* and *Hinn Mikli Dreki* evoke images of Viking battles and mystical rituals.

Skáld officially formed in 2018, although Voisin-Boisvinet says the idea dates back to six years prior. He acknowledges that, in the process, he stepped into a Nordic and prog-adjacent folk space already dominated by Wardruna and Heilung. "For me, the master of this area is Wardruna," the musician says, "and I've been fortunate enough to share the stage with Heilung. But what sets us apart is that we are not dark. For example, if we wrote a song about a wolf, it'd be about how to tame the wolf and defuse that situation."

True to that spirit of differentiating himself from the pack, Voisin-Boisvinet also says that Skáld's tunes will only grow more avant-garde and expansive as the band goes onwards. "One of my aims is to continue with lots of different voices: more voices, different timbres, different pitches. And another thing I'm interested in is sounds directly from nature. I want to include the musicality of water on stone, as well as other northern European languages."

He concludes by adding: "I don't want to just be Old Norse." **MM**

**"I've shared the stage with Heilung. But what sets us apart is that we are not dark."**

# MIDLAKE

## THE TRIALS OF VAN OCCUPANTHER

(Bella Union, 2006)

For one of the most acclaimed indie records of its era, the second LP by Denton, Texas' Midlake has some seriously proggy credentials. A concept? Check. Esoteric-sounding title? Hell, yeah. Cover art mysterious and alluring enough to rival Hipgnosis' oddest images? Check. *The Trials Of Van Occupanther* doesn't have any Mellotron or flugelhorn, but it does have autoharp, dulcimer and some gorgeous flute courtesy of the band's then-frontman and chief songwriter, Tim Smith. Better yet it's a world unto itself: a magical and mysterious place in which the listener can lose themselves.

Opener *Roscoe* – a Fleetwood Mac–ish gem later given a seven-minute, psychedelic remix by DJ Erol Alkan, AKA Beyond The Wizard's Sleeve – is immediately transporting. Its lyrics takes a fond look back at stonecutters in a late 19th-century pioneering community, and elsewhere, too, these beautifully wrought, lyrically arcane–sounding songs fantasise about a simpler, less acquisitive existence in the pre-industrial world. '*Did you ever want to hand over all of your things and start over new*?' runs part of the piano and woody analogue synth-ornamented *Bandits*. Elsewhere, this great American pastoral has songs alluding to 300-year-old giants (*We Gathered In Spring*) and unreachable, daydreaming girls (*Chasing After Deer*).

Most intriguing of all, though, is *Van Occupanther* the song, a perfectly-weighted ballad, which concerns the album's titular, seemingly put upon hermit. Who is this enigmatic character who busies himself with '*years of calculations*' as he ferries around buckets of water, avoiding other members of his community? We're never quite sure, but we assume the guy in the sinister, hand-crafted panther mask on the album's cover is meant to be him. We also sense Van Occupanther's inherent sadness and learn he has an unrequited crush on a woman '*who never mentions a word to me.*' It's certainly hard not to empathise.

Tim Smith would leave Midlake after their next LP, 2010's *The Courage Of Others*, but on *The Trials Of Van Occupanther*, his bandmates seem wholly in tune with his oddly singular vision. As Smith sketches out these wistful, hugely evocative tales in his wounded, emotive baritone, Paul Alexander proves an especially inventive and kinetic bassist, while guitarist Eric Pulido's feral-sounding guitar solo on *Head Home* is a beautifully barbed and well executed ambush.

Circa *The Trials of Van Occupanther*, Midlake's studio listening mostly comprised 70s records by Fleetwood Mac, Jethro Tull, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young. It was reportedly a very taxing LP to make, but the magnificent results speak for themselves, and, even today, the record's beautiful mysteries remain intact. At the time, none other than The Modfather himself, Paul Weller, was one of the many who declared himself a fan, and that made perfect sense. Here, after all, was a record that really took things back to the wild, wild wood.

**JAMES MCNAIR**

# ALL AROUND THE WORLD

## Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Under The Surface combine influences from across the ages.

PRESS

# UNDER THE SURFACE

Bringing together three generations of musical experience, the improvisational Dutch trio alter states of consciousness.

**The worst thing** that can happen when sending a speculative mail is reading the word "no". Fortunately for young Dutch singer Sanne Rambags, the answer was in the affirmative when she approached seasoned jazz drummer Joost Lijbaart and experienced guitarist Bram Stadhouders with a view to working together on a new project.

"Eight years ago, she was selected by the Beaux Jazz initiative to do an experimental concert with two musicians who are on a different path in their career," explains Lijbaart of Under The Surface's origins. "So we did a gig and I thought, 'This is cool.'"

Organising a recording session, Lijbaart knew that the trio had hit on something special. They fused elements of folk, jazz and ambient music among other influences with Rambags' ethereal vocals to create largely improvised sounds characterised by a universality that easily crosses borders.

Says Stadhouders, "With a lot of non-western traditions, music is about bringing yourself and other people to a different state of mind and this is what we do."

Utilising Lijbaart's extensive contacts, Under The Surface were soon playing festivals in Mali, Cuba, Mexico, India and China as well as Europe. Crucial to the development of the band's sound is the generational spread of the three principals — Sanne Rambags is 29 years old, Stadhouders is 35 while Lijbaart is the oldest at 56.

"If you play with people from a different generation, they grew up with different music, so they bring in different stuff," says Lijbaart.

"From there, you can do different experiments," agrees Stadhouders.

Across three albums — *Under The Surface* (2017), *Trinity* (2019) and *Miin Triuwa* (2022) — Under The Surface's music is suffused with both a shamanistic and spiritual quality.

"When you improvise, you basically play what you don't know," says Lijbaart. "And the only way to do that in a good way is to get rid of your ego and be in a moment. A lot of people in spiritual connections try to be in the moment and we do that on the stage." **JM**

**"Our music brings other people to a different state of mind."**

*See triounderthesurface.com for more information.*

## PROG IN BRIEF

Swedish art-proggers **Gaupa** (right) have recorded three special live versions of their songs *Moloken*, *Sömnen* and *Febersvan* at Monkey Moon Studios in Dortmund. The session can be heard on all digital streaming services. See www.gaupaband.com.

**Family**'s classic 1972 album, *Bandstand*, has been remastered and expanded with the addition of alternate takes and a BBC Radio session from the same year. Released via Esoteric, it's out on November 24. More details at www.cherryred.co.uk.

# JERBOAH

Eclectic combination of jazz rock and art-pop from multinational quartet.

**THOSE WHO CLAIM** to play without musical boundaries very rarely follow through on such declarations. But one group of musicians that seem to buck the trend are Amsterdam-based quartet Jerboah. A live set by them feels like a trip through the history of popular music. Not that the band are entirely free of labels, as EWI (electronic wind instrument) player Dodó Kis explains: "We describe ourselves as genre-bending worldbeat and post-pop."

Jerboah's instrumentation is highly unusual. Guitar and drums combine with the recorder and vocal talents of Brit Sarah Jeffery, while Kis' EWI provides both bass lines and synth-style solos. This unexpected configuration evolved from the band's original 2014 line-up, which was augmented in 2016 when Kis and Argentinian drummer Marcos Baggiani joined. It was this ensemble that recorded the EPs *Bristly* and *Gnaw*, but it took a global event to bring about major change in their sound.

Says Jeffery, "When the coronavirus came along and stopped everything, Jerboah reconfigured and we reformed it in a fresh way."

"We all come from different musical and cultural backgrounds," Kis continues. "That's something that we cherish. The genre-bending allows us to combine all of that without compromising. We all listen to many different types of music and we don't want to restrict ourselves from bringing all those influences into the band."

Jeffery agrees: "We write songs about subjects that we're really passionate about, like the despair of climate change or just the feeling you get when you don't want to go out and see anybody. Humour is also important as we sometimes need to balance out the heavy subjects with lighter material."

It's hugely encouraging that a group of such eclectic multinational musicians can come together successfully in such a musical melting pot as Amsterdam.

"There are a lot of international residents coming here," says Kis. "Amsterdam has something of an equal mix of international residents and Dutch."

Jeffery elaborates. "It's just so natural to have this cultural and musical mix — I can't imagine anything else," she says. "So that's why when something like Brexit happens, we want to sing about that. It should be that anybody from anywhere should be able to use any type of music they want and make something wonderful."

The band's trip-hop inspired reinterpretation of Bronski Beat's 1980s synthpop hit *Smalltown Boy* is especially striking. Jeffery reveals why they chose to cover it. "We all thought we'd give it a go, particularly as it's a pride-acceptance song. We also have another piece called *Unicorn*, which is about bisexual rights. These issues are important to us."

*Smalltown Boy* is among the new live tracks available on YouTube, and given that the band's last studio recordings came out in 2018, it's perhaps unsurprising that more new material is on its way.

"We actually have a full album recorded," says Kis. "It's in the final mixing mastering stage. We have a video for a song of Marcos' called *Walking* that's almost finished. That will be out soon. Then we hope to have an album out in the spring of next year." Watch this space! **SL**

**PROG FILE**

**LINE-UP**

**Sarah Jeffery** *(recorder, vocals)*, **Dodó Kis** *(EWI, recorder, vocals)*, **Marcos Baggiani** *(drums, vocals)*, **Guillermo Celano** *(guitar)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

A wonderfully eclectic mixture of fusion and free jazz combined with issue-led art-pop

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*Bristly* and *Gnaw* EPs are out now via Bandcamp

**WEBSITE**

www.jerboahmusic.com

**"We all come from different musical and cultural backgrounds. That's something that we cherish."**

Jerboah are happy to sing about important things... with a few jokes thrown in.

PRESS/ALYSHA CLEMENS

# Official Progressive Albums Chart

## The prog top 30 albums

October 2023

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(SW RECORDS)*
2 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
3 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
4 **XTC** The Big Express *(APE HOUSE)*
5 **BRUCE SOORD** Luminescence *(KSCOPE)*
6 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD)*
7 **TREVOR RABIN** Rio *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
8 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
9 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
10 **PINK FLOYD** Animals (2018 Remix) *(PINK FLOYD RECORDS/RHINO)*
11 **STEVE HACKETT** Foxtrot At Fifty + Hackett Highlights: Live *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
12 **MIKE OLDFIELD** Tubular Bells – 50th Anniversary Edition *(UMC)*
13 **TAME IMPALA** Lonerism *(FICTION)*
14 **JETHRO TULL** The Broadsword And The Beast *(PARLOPHONE)*
15 **POLYPHIA** Remember That You Will Die *(RISE)*
16 **ROGER WATERS** The Lockdown Sessions *(SONY MUSIC)*
17 **HAWKLORDS** Space *(HAWKLORDS)*
18 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
19 **KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
20 **WITHIN TEMPTATION** Bleed Out *(FORCE MUSIC)*
21 **JOHN LODGE** Days Of Future Passed – My Sojourn *(KEEPING THE FAITH)*
22 **MOGWAI** The Hawk Is Howling (Remastered) *(ROCK ACTION)*
23 **THE FLOWER KINGS** Look At You Now *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
24 **FAMILY** Fearless *(ESOTERIC)*
25 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
26 **THE FLAMING LIPS** Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots *(WARNER MUSIC)*
27 **MARILLION** Seasons End *(Remastered) (PLG)*
28 **PORCUPINE TREE** Deadwing *(TRANSMISSION)*
29 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Inform Educate Entertain *(TEST CARD)*
30 **JONATHAN WILSON** Eat The Worm *(BMG)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

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There's no denying Rick Wakeman's prog credentials, and now five years' worth of his solo material has been compiled into a limited-edition box. *The Prog Years 1973-1977* is available in a selection of formats including this very limited deluxe 32-disc CD and DVD package, which one lucky reader will win in this month's competition.

The set includes CD versions of the keyboard player's studio albums: *Six Wives Of Henry VIII*, *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*, *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table* and *No Earthly Connection*, along with the soundtracks *White Rock* and *Lisztomania*. But that's not all, because this special collection also encompasses rare live material, demos, alternative mixes and live footage from one of Wakeman's most successful eras, as well as a hardback book, postcards, posters, replica programmes, press photos and reproduction press releases. It's the perfect collection for the Rick fan who had everything... until now!

To be in with a chance of winning this star prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG145 and answer the following question:

**Wakeman's 1977 soundtrack for the *White Rock* documentary borrows parts of another composition from which of his earlier studio albums?**

**a) *Six Wives Of Henry VIII***

**b) *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth***

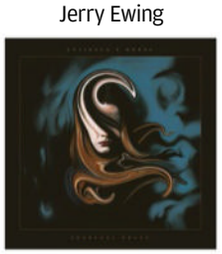
**c) *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table***

For more information see www.rwcc.com

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from November 24–December 29, 2023. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.**

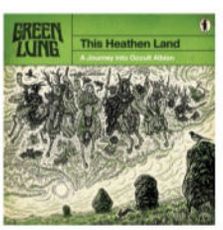
# Now our turn...

**The Editor**
Jerry Ewing



**CALIGULA'S HORSE**
**Charcoal Grace**
INSIDEOUTMUSIC

**The Art Guy**
Russell Fairbrother




**GREEN LUNG**
**This Heathen Land**
NUCLEAR BLAST

**The Deputy Ed**
Natasha Scharf

**SPURV**
**Brefjære**
PELAGIC

**The Musician**
Guy Garvey

**YETI LANE**
**The Echo Show**
SONIC CATHEDRAL

**The Writer**
Joel McIver

**OZRIC TENTACLES**
**Lotus Unfolding**
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PRESS/LUPUS LINDEMANN

Zahn cast a curious eye over the German caravanning habit.

# ZAHN

Experimental Berliners bear their post-rock teeth on motorik beats.

**BERLIN'S ZAHN LIKE** to have their cake and eat it. As hard as the boney incisor they named themselves after ('zahn' means 'tooth' in German and is pronounced with an 's' rather than a 'z' sound), they are the purest distillation of the instrumental power trio, but also an experimental electronic outfit at the same time.

"We deliberately decided to be just three people," confirms guitarist Felix Gebhard. "It's the essence of a rock group. But then, of course, we add a lot of stuff on top when we're at the studio." Accordingly, a crunchy rocker like *Zehn* is overlaid with patches of ominous synth drones, while *Zebra* combines industrial pistons with Cluster-like synth garnishment leading to digital enlightenment.

Zahn's second album *Adria* is a punishing-yet-controlled 80 minutes of instrumental post-rock mayhem, a loose concept album about German mobile homes gravitating towards the Adriatic Sea during the summer (caravans in that part of the world often carry an 'Adria' sticker). Gebhard says it's open to interpretation, but the title might convey the sense of freedom that holidaying brings, or it might just as easily embody the pathos of being trapped in the system: uniformly taking your two weeks' leave before returning to graft for The Man.

"You can definitely hear that pathos in the final track *Idylle*," he admits, "where we surfed on some sad feelings that maybe evoke nostalgia. But it was always more of a loose concept than anything."

When he's not playing guitar with his bandmates in Zahn, Gebhard stands in as a live auxiliary man for Berlin's most influential noise punks Einstürzende Neubauten.

"I don't hit things," he declares. "I play the keyboards and everything that doesn't need to be hit. I reproduce everything that they can't reproduce onstage that's been done in the studio with strings and organs." Playing in Zahn is his main job and that goes for bassist Chris Breuer and drummer Nic Stockmann, who also play in Heads.

On *Adria* the trio have expanded their sound compared with their self-titled debut from 2021. Zahn's music has often been described as krautrock, though Gebhard is not so sure. He says he has a "hard time" with the term.

"I just think that krautrock is something that happened in the past, but it's easy to describe a certain style of repetitive rock music as krautrock. No two krautrock bands sound alike: Neu! doesn't sound like Can and Can doesn't sound like Kraftwerk."

Zahn are nevertheless influenced by all of the above — by a process of osmosis — and Gebhard describes himself as a second-generation prog fan, too. By that, he means that while he has Genesis albums at home, it's groups such as the kaleidoscopic and sponge-like Motorpsycho from Trondheim in Norway that really send him into a spin (ergo, he's influenced by them, while they take from first-generation prog).

"Why this band isn't world-famous I will never understand," he says, shaking his head. **JA**

**"We deliberately decided to be just three people. It's the essence of a rock group."**

## PROG FILE

**LINE-UP**

**Felix Gebhard** *(guitar/electronics)*, **Nic Stockmann** *(drummer)*, **Chris Breuer** *(bass)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

Jaki Liebezeit and Dieter Moebius revived, distilled and fed through a Marshall stack

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*Adria* is out now via Crazysane Records

**WEBSITE**

zahn3.bandcamp.com

# GALAHAD

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**www.galahadonline.com**

PRESS/JØRN VEBERG

Spurv: not fond of jam sessions, but love a bit of storytelling.

# SPURV

Norwegian six-piece take post-rock to explosive new heights.

**"THE THING I** admire most in other bands and musicians, and strive to achieve myself, is an acute attention to composition — and how albums function as a whole and not merely as collections of independent songs," guitarist and main composer Gustav Jørgen Pedersen explains, after *Prog* asks what sets Norwegian post-rockers Spurv apart from their peers in an oversaturated market.

According to him, Spurv exist in "a genre of music that has been very codified over the last decade or so". The difference is that they've found a space in which to exist almost uniquely, due to their hypnotic yet enthralling combination of post-rock and orchestral magnificence, which is captured on their recent fourth album, *Brefjære*. "I think there's no reason to listen to the same chord progressions played over and over again," Pedersen continues, "accompanied by the same sounds and the same drum beats."

The collective take a more considered approach to their craft. After a stringent composition process — which involves Pedersen's initial writing and a follow-up co-composition with guitarist Eirik Ørevik Aadland and trombonist Simen Eifring — comes the improvisation. Ole-Henrik Moe (cello) and Kari Rønnekleiv (violin) joined Spurv in the studio for their previous album, 2018's *Myra*, with "awesome" results from improvisation, Pedersen tells us. "This time, we asked Ole-Henrik and Kari again, as well as [Norwegian Grammy Award-winning violinist] Inger Hannisdal and Jørgen Bagheera Apeness [vibraphone]," he explains. They were invited to the studio to simply "respond" to the music Spurv had already recorded.

"What we don't do is jamming and making music together in the rehearsal space," Pedersen says. "We simply can't do it." *Prog* wonders why this might be. "We have tried, and it just becomes boring, standard music, easily identifiable as being in the style of Russian Circles, Explosions In The Sky or MONO."

Far from being generic in composition, *Brefjære* tells the story of four main "characters": a birch tree, a mountain, a butterfly, and the wind engaging in conversation. "The birch tree asks the mountain why the wind blows; it is, in a sense, a symbolistic myth about the nature of human beings," Pedersen tells us. "Where the different characters can be said to represent different timescales, from the relative short lifespan of an individual to the long-lived cultural phenomena that each and every one of us carry throughout our lives and deliver over to future generations." Pedersen describes this idea as a "dramatic narrative" and it's difficult to find flaws in his explanation.

Spurv have an impressive list of credits for *Brefjære*, which even includes a 14-piece choir, and it's all down to the musician's belief that "more is more". Minimalist is never a word you could use to describe them, so fans of their eclectic, collaborative, maximalist approach will be pleased to learn that Spurv will be continuing work on their next record following their recent tour with This Will Destroy You and The Ocean. "We're hoping it'll take less than five years this time," adds Pedersen with a smile. **CF**

**"There's no reason to listen to the same chord progressions played over and over."**

## PROG FILE

**LINE-UP**

**Gustav Jørgen Pedersen** *(guitars)*, **Herman Otterlei** *(guitars)*, **Hans-Jakob Jeremiassen** *(bass)*, **Simon Ljung** *(drums)*, **Eirik Ørevik Aadland** *(guitars)*, **Simen Eifring** *(trombone)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

A cascading wall of post-rock tinged with orchestral resplendence that engulfs the listener over and over again

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*Brefjære* is out now on Pelagic

**WEBSITE**

www.spurv.net

Q&A

# NICK FLETCHER

The jazz rock guitarist and John Hackett Band member discusses his classical influences and the threads of mysticism that run through his work.

**Words:** Mike Barnes **Portrait:** Liv Roberts

Initially drawn to rock music, Nick Fletcher was inspired by Julian Bream and Andrés Segovia to study classical guitar at Huddersfield School Of Music. And although "for a teenager it wasn't the coolest thing to do", he felt justified in that Steve Hackett and Jan Akkerman had also explored that style.

On graduating in 1981, Fletcher played electric guitar in a prog band, Plan B, with keyboardist Dave Bainbridge, but they struggled to gain recognition. From 1990 there followed a period of 25 years spent teaching and composing classical guitar music, with solo albums, and duets with flautist John Hackett. In 2015 Fletcher took up the electric again and has played and recorded with the John Hackett Band and released a number of prog/jazz fusion solo albums. The most recent, the instrumental *Quadrivium*, released on Rough Draft Audio in September, features Bainbridge and Caroline Bonnett on keyboards and former Jeff Beck drummer Anika Nilles.

**Would you say your classical guitar training informed your electric playing?**
Yes, having that background made playing the electric guitar easier and also gave me a greater understanding of the instrument; how the notes fitted together on the fingerboard. It helped me enormously to unlock the guitar.

**Which electric guitarists influenced you?**
From the late 60s, there was a wave of incredibly talented players: Steve Howe, Jan Akkerman, David Gilmour, Steve Hackett, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page — the list goes on. I was fortunate to grow up in an era when I could assimilate that. John McLaughlin became a big influence, and Allan Holdsworth — his concept and approach to playing the guitar was very different and resonated with me.

Some people think of melody as being something succinct that you can sing, but [Holdsworth's playing] is more like a baroque melody, which can go on for a long time but has fluency and coherence. I've never learned guitar licks to create a solo, I just think in terms of melody, follow my nose and see where it goes.

**"If it wasn't for Steve Hackett, I wouldn't have travelled the classical route."**

**How would you describe your chemistry with John Hackett?**
We started out as a flute and guitar duo playing baroque repertoire — Bach, Handel and Vivaldi, and some of John's own tunes. He's also a singer and songwriter and we have a lot in common in that we both feel we don't really fit in too many places. We straddle both camps of classical and progressive rock — and I'm more fusion as well. John also loves melody, so even though I go off on a tangent sometimes, I think he appreciates the melodic aspect that I bring to the John Hackett Band.

I don't like to be put in a box as a blues, rock, jazz or classical guitar player. I'm always listening and trying to incorporate lots of things into what I do. One of the great things about being involved in progressive music is that it encompasses all that and most of the listeners are broad-minded.

**Your website bio claims that your 2021 album *Cycles Of Behaviour* was influenced by Camel, Stravinsky, Ravel and Herbert Howells. That's quite a mix! Can you discern a thread that runs through all that music?**
Yes, definitely. I have quite a modal approach to writing. I like more plaintive-sounding music, which is based upon modes, and the composers that you mentioned, that's very much what they do. I also use a lot of polytonality, where you incorporate two or more different keys simultaneously within a harmonic structure. And on [*Quadrivium*] I do that more than I have done before. There are odd time signatures, which you find in Stravinsky's writing as well. And in Caravan and Camel's music back in the 70s there was a huge amount of very concentrated, well-written melody.

***Quadrivium* was inspired by Plato's philosophy and is conceptually pretty weighty. Did the idea or the music come first?**
I'd been writing the music for a while, but it didn't feel too coherent. But the whole notion of *Quadrivium*, or the 'Four Noble Arts', sparked something off in my imagination. And I thought, "This would be interesting to explore in music that takes the listener on a journey." I like to have a unifying concept, some kind of narrative that draws the music together.

**You've recorded albums of hymns and have explored mysticism and esoteric philosophy, and that spiritual dimension seems important to your music.**
On the new album there's that element as well. [Prelude] *A Wave On The Ocean Of Eternity* is almost a quote from the philosopher Alan Watts, whose writing sparked my imagination for that track. And there are a couple of Eastern-sounding tracks, which are moving into Shakti/Mahavishnu territory. And that's partly because I wanted to explore Hindu mysticism, something else that I'm very interested in. So you're right, it comes through in my music, because it's a part of who I am and what I want to express.

**Is there any chance of audiences getting to see the *Quadrivium* band play live?**
It would be a dream come true, but it's too expensive to put on the road. But the John Hackett Band are halfway through recording a new album, which is planned for release in late January. And then next year we've got gigs all over the country to promote that album.

**Steve Hackett said that you are "probably the best jazz rock guitarist in the country" — quite some accolade.**
To have your guitar hero saying those things is just great. I was very moved by that. And if it wasn't for Steve, I wouldn't have travelled the classical route. As a 15-year-old boy listening to *The Voyage Of The Acolyte* I was in awe of Steve's writing and playing and also thought to myself, "Blimey, he's got a brother who plays the flute brilliantly!" And then years later to find myself being friends with Steve and playing with John was almost surreal. We've had a good collaboration and it's been a fantastic experience.

*Quadrivium is out now via Rough Draft Audio.*
*See www.nickfletcherguitarmusic.com for more information.*

They were Yes before and they were Yes after. But what on earth happened in between?

# MOVING THROUGH SOME Chan

The short-lived *Drama* era in 1980 was almost the death of **Yes**. Yet three years later, the heroes of British progressive rock had been completely reinvented with massive worldwide success. In *90125* they had their biggest-selling album and a worldwide hit single. On the record's 40th anniversary, we look back on how a new band without a deal became an 80s success story.

**Words:** Stephen Lambe
**Main image:** Ebet Roberts/ Redferns/Getty images

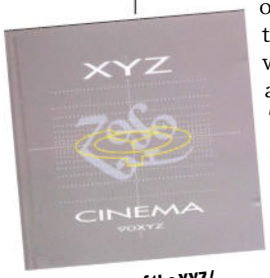
In January 1981, Yes met at Steve Howe's house in Hampstead. The previous year had been a fraught one for the band: following the departure of Jon Anderson and Rick Wakeman, the three remaining members – Chris Squire, Alan White and Howe – had recruited Trevor Horn and Geoff Downes from the new-wavers The Buggles. The resulting album, *Drama*, remains a fan favourite, but was created under extreme pressure with a US tour only months away. During the shows that followed, Horn frequently struggled to fill Anderson's shoes. All was not well.

"I told Chris that it sounded a bit like Yes. To which Chris said, 'That's why you're here.'"

**Jon Anderson**

# ges – How *90125* Saved Yes

Horn was effectively fired after the tour, and Squire and White announced a plan to form a new project with Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin. This left Howe and Downes holding the baby, with no appetite to continue as Yes. Within months, the remaining duo joined forces with John Wetton and Carl Palmer to form Asia, while Horn made the second Buggles album and started a production career. Then-manager Brian Lane was horrified: he'd lost Yes and the band went on to lose their record contract with Atlantic.

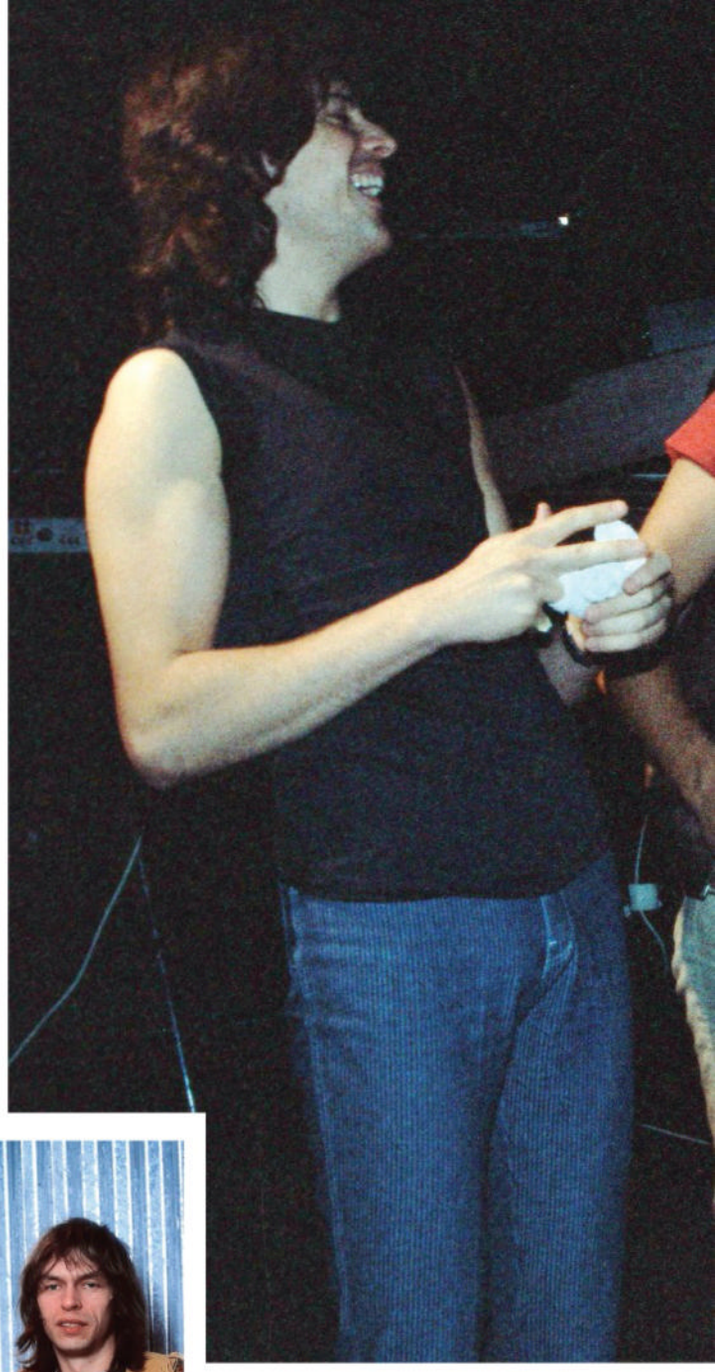


A bootleg copy of the XYZ/ Cinema sessions.

The few months that White and Squire spent rehearsing with Page as part of XYZ are the stuff of legend. Page, himself reeling from the death of John Bonham just months before, was initially enthusiastic and the trio pooled material, producing several demos. It didn't take long, however, before the relationship began to fall apart, scuppered by both musical and managerial disagreements. At a loose end once more, the pair teamed up with lyricist Peter Sinfield and recorded a Christmas single, *Run With The Fox*, which was released towards the end of 1981. It's since become something of an unsung classic in the Yuletide sing-along genre.

Although XYZ never recorded an album, it's clear that the two former Yes men had music in mind that was a little more contemporary in tone, even compared to the energetic prog of *Drama*. Some pieces from those rehearsals would wind up on later Yes albums: the Squire song *Telephone Secrets*, which never found a home with Yes, shows a band combining musical chops with commercial aspirations. This would become the template for their new band, Cinema.

Meanwhile, South African guitarist Trevor Rabin was also at something of a crossroads. Following fame in his homeland as part of Rabbitt, he had moved to the UK and released three solo albums on the Chrysalis label before a songwriting development deal with the new Geffen label led to him suddenly moving to California. However, things started to turn sour, and after a period rehearsing, ironically, with Howe and Downes' Asia in London, he was unceremoniously dropped by Geffen. However, Rabin wasn't short on interest.



August 1980 line-up, L-R: Alan White, Geoff Downes, Chris Squire, Trevor Horn, Steve Howe.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

"I started sending out demo tapes," he remembers. "The irony is that I sent out all this material that was going to end up on *90125*, like *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* and *Changes*, and they were rejected. I've still got the letter from Clive Davis at Arista saying, 'While we feel your voice has Top 40 appeal, we feel your song [*Owner...*] is too left-field for the marketplace today.'"

Other offers came in.

"There was talk of a band with Keith Emerson, Cozy Powell and Jack Bruce, but that idea didn't move forward," Rabin remembers. "Then Ron Fair, a fantastic A&R guy at RCA, offered me a solo deal, so it was that: the band with Keith and Jack or the possibility of a band with Chris Squire and Alan White via Phil Carson at Atlantic, who had also heard the demos. In the end, Phil — who's a pretty persuasive guy — called me up and said, 'Come on, stop fucking around.' So the next thing I knew, I was in a sushi restaurant in Shepherd's Bush [west London] getting to know Chris and Alan."

The band, then known as Cinema, share a laugh between rehearsals at John Henrys.

DAVID WATKINSON

At the end of the evening, the trio went back to Squire's house in Virginia Water in Surrey and had what Squire referred to as "the worst jam in history". Rabin agrees: "It didn't sound great, but it felt *so* right."

Squire, Rabin and White found themselves in another development deal financed by Phil Carson personally, with the freedom to work on material at their own pace at John Henrys rehearsal studio in Islington, north London. Carson already had a long history with Yes. As an executive at Atlantic, it was he who had convinced the label to re-sign Yes after their second album, *Time And A Word*, flopped in the US. He'd also introduced Yes to long-time engineer Eddie Offord and had stayed in close touch with the band, especially Chris Squire, throughout their success in the 1970s.

But the group needed a keyboard player, and both Carson and Squire saw the logic of bringing in Tony Kaye, Yes' original keys man. Carson confirms that even at this early stage, it was in his mind that Yes should be revived while the band rehearsed.

"Part of my job is being a marketing guy. A new band is difficult to sell. An established one is much easier," he acknowledges. So, having Kaye in the band would take the line-up closer to being Yes from day one. As a bonus, Kaye had a certain charisma, and the way he played would also suit the new band. Squire, however, had the job of selling the idea to Rabin.

"Chris suggested Tony," says Rabin. "I didn't know him, but Chris said that he was a 'meat and potato' keyboard player, a real Hammond guy. He said to me: 'I think he'll be right for the band because you're a little fancy!'"

> "The next thing I knew, I was in a sushi restaurant in Shepherd's Bush getting to know Chris and Alan."
> **Trevor Rabin**

They called themselves Cinema and started to rehearse material that both Rabin and Squire had originated. As rehearsals went on, Kaye also began to contribute. "We rehearsed some of my songs," Rabin remembers, "and there was also a song called *Open Your Doors*, which Chris had written, that had Alan on electronic drums. We also played the song that we used as the intro to *Owner...* live, called *Make It Easy*."

Despite the four-piece's chemistry, there was talk of a fifth member.

"During the rehearsal process, Chris mentioned bringing in a singer and suggested Trevor Horn," Rabin recalls. "I was confused. Chris had told me that, during the shows, he started at the front of the stage, and by the third song, he was standing beside the drums. I said, 'What for?' Chris said, 'He could sing, you could sing, I could sing. It might be good.' But I just knew him as a pop producer. He turned up to rehearsals with a guitar. I said,

Cinema rehearsals at John Henrys Studios, London, 1982. Inset: A very happy Chris Squire sits by the mixing desk.

ALL PHOTOS: DAVID WATKINSON

'Is that a prop, or are you going to use it?' We just didn't hit it off at that point at all. Within 24 hours, I told Chris that it wasn't working for me. I loved working with Chris, Alan and Tony, but I was ready to pack it in and come home. Then, suddenly, Trevor wasn't there, so we carried on with everything going smoothly."

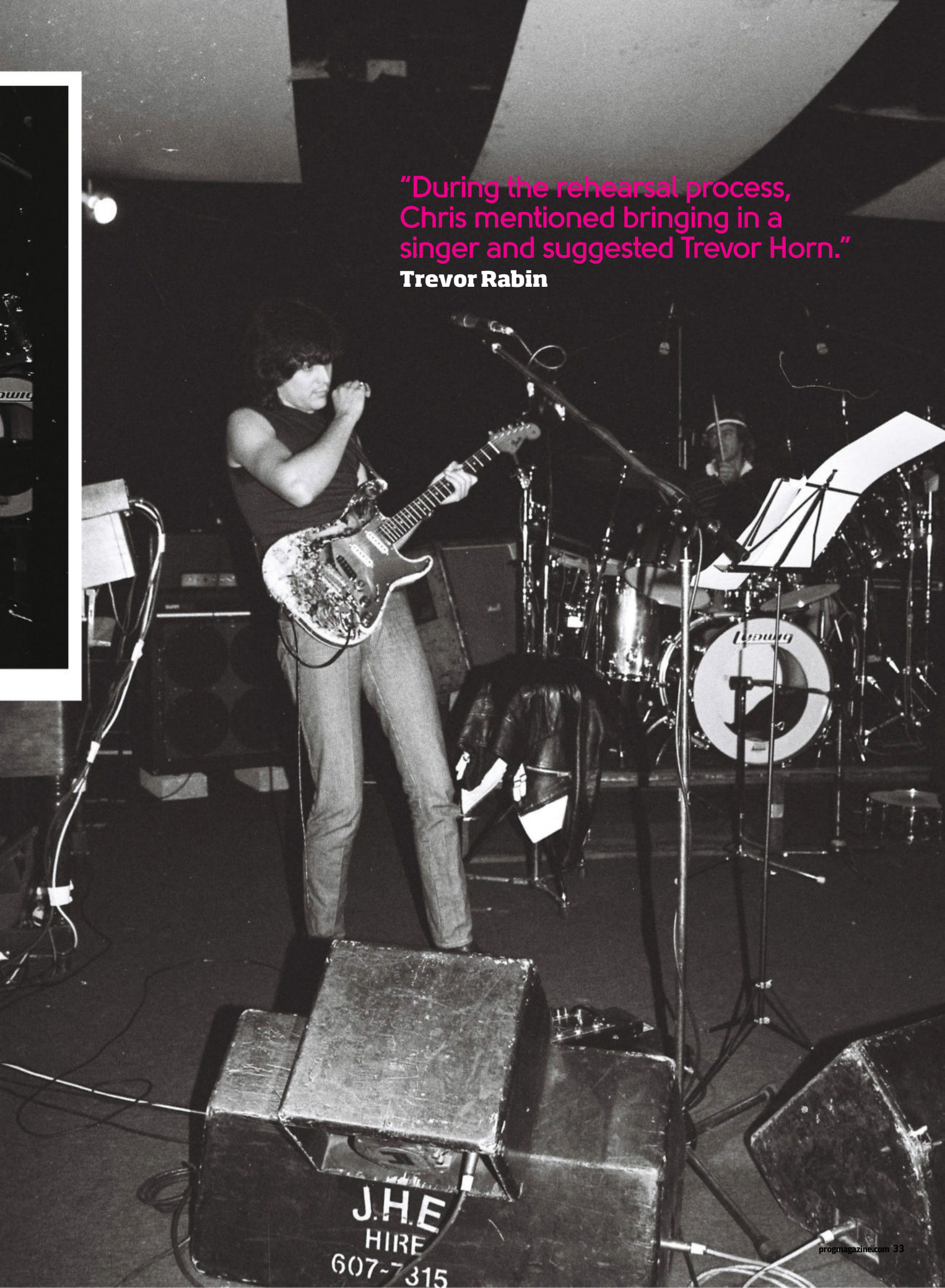
Rabin also remembers the music becoming more complex. "We were having such fun playing together, and we were introducing some interesting time signatures and some exciting chordal left-turns into the music."

Eventually, the band invited others to hear what they were doing. Yes fans Jon Dee and David Watkinson, both involved in the fanzine scene, were the only members of the public invited to watch the rehearsals at John Henrys in 1982. By that time, the group had worked up some live tracks that appeared complete, yet none of these songs would appear on *90125*. They played three pieces: *Carry On*, *Make It Easy* (which was then called *Take It Easy*) and Squire's *Open Your Doors*. Between each, Kaye also rehearsed the keyboard introduction to what would become *Hearts*.

With the rehearsal period drawing to a close, the next question was: who was going to produce the Cinema album? Canadian Bob Ezrin, best known for his work with Alice Cooper and with Pink Floyd on *The Wall*, was the favourite for some time, with Queen producer Roy Thomas Baker and Rabin's old mentor, Mutt Lange, also in the frame. Rabin remembers a long, boozy dinner with all of them. The three legendary producers got along famously, but nothing was decided and so the search continued.

In the end, Squire decided to ask Trevor Horn to take the recording on. Horn was by no means convinced. After all, he had been ousted by the band the year before, and while he bore no grudge, his wife and manager Jill Sinclair did. Furthermore, by now, he was an up-and-coming pop producer, acclaimed for his work with pop duo Dollar and on ABC's award-winning debut, *The Lexicon Of Love*. Why would he get involved with a bunch of old rock stars who didn't even have a record deal? Luckily, Horn remained a Yes fan and Squire's charm was legendary. That charm was also needed to convince Rabin.

"Chris said, 'I know you and Trevor Horn won't ever play onstage




"During the rehearsal process, Chris mentioned bringing in a singer and suggested Trevor Horn."

**Trevor Rabin**

together, but how do you feel about him producing us?' I said, 'Who? The Dollar guy?' I was really apprehensive, and Tony Kaye wasn't into the idea at all. In the end, I just decided to get my head down to make the album work."

It turned out to be the right decision, and Rabin and Horn would later form a strong bond in the studio.

With discussions continuing and with Rabin briefly back at home in Los Angeles, Horn paid him a visit to hear his songs. The producer maintains that while Rabin was in the bathroom, he heard a demo of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* at the end of the tape and realised it had the potential to be a massive hit.

**Fanzine *Yes Music* sent their editor, Jon Dee, and photographer David Watkinson to the rehearsals for Cinema; those photos are included here.**

DAVID WATKINSON

**Perfecting their sound at John Henrys, London.**

"One inaccurate thing that keeps coming up is that *Owner...* was lost in some sort of bad cataloguing on my part," says Rabin. "It's not the case. Back when RCA wanted to sign me as a solo artist the year before, that was the song they were really hot on, and I knew that it would be a flagship track. Trevor Horn says he had to talk us into doing it, but that's not quite true."

While the band hadn't rehearsed it as Cinema, Rabin always had it in mind, choosing to tackle the songs with more complex arrangements first. Horn, however, maintains that recording that potential chart-topper was the thing that convinced him to produce the album in the first place.

Recording began in London with Gary Langan as chief engineer, but Horn struggled initially. Having already dealt with new technology and relatively pliable artists, he now had to deal with experienced musicians with opinions of their own. Horn began to feel that this project was a ship beset by high seas.

Although their relationship was certainly improving, Horn and Rabin locked horns over the approach to recording Alan White's drums. Robert 'Mutt' Lange, Rabin's colleague from South Africa, was best known for producing AC/DC and Def Leppard with a drum style that Horn felt was wrong for such an expressive player as White. Rabin was given an opportunity to record the drums in Mutt's style, which didn't work, and the South African accepted defeat.

There is genuine contradiction over the ownership of *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*, particularly considering its massive, ongoing success. It's mainly Rabin's song; he wrote the chorus and the main verse melody, although a conventional middle eight was dropped. Anderson and Squire also made contributions. Horn, however, has always claimed to have rewritten parts of the verses, saying that Jon Anderson sang the song as soon as he appeared in the studio, and was then surprised to be asked to re-record it after Horn had changed it. However, Rabin insists that Horn had no part in the writing process and that he never should have agreed to adding his name to the credits. Rabin was understandably careful about giving up his share of the publishing, so when Jon Anderson later made some changes to the song, Phil Carson had to persuade Rabin to give up a portion of the publishing to Anderson.

> **"Chris called me and wanted me to hear some of the music he'd been making. We sat in Chris' Bentley and he played me some of the songs."**
>
> **Jon Anderson**

Carson remembers, "I sat down with Trevor Rabin and his lovely wife Shelley, who is very astute. She asked if Trevor would make more money if we did this. I said he would. So she allowed me to give Jon the credit."

What Horn *is* responsible for is the originality of the final arrangement. First, he got the band to play the song straight without any

NIKE

embellishments, which according to Horn wasn't easy and produced a small, if brief, mutiny. Then there was the drum sound. Yes had never recorded over a click track or a drum machine. However, Horn insisted on programming the drums so that White could play over them. To his credit, White did, with the snare tuned high in the style of Stuart Copeland of The Police, whose drum sound Horn loved. White remembered Horn gradually taking away more of his kit so that all he was left with was a hi-hat, snare and bass drum. This didn't please everyone, with Nu Nu Whiting, White's roadie, commenting that his drums sounded like "a pee on a barrel".

Rabin's guitar solo, played in fifths for a slightly off-kilter tone, was improvised in the studio, while the famous horn stabs, often misheard as orchestral, were taken from a cassette that had been transferred onto the Fairlight sampler. They had originally been used on the Malcolm McLaren album *Duck Rock*, which Horn had just produced. The random musical effects that make the record so unusual were played on the Fairlight by Alan White.

Recording progressed at the two Sarm studios in London, with a further session at George Martin's Air Studios. It was there that the Grammy-winning instrumental *Cinema* was recorded. It was originally intended to open a long track called *Time*, which was never recorded in full. Due to how expensive the studio was, Horn begged Squire, famed for his terrible timekeeping, to arrive on time. In true style, he was five hours late.

> "Part of my job is being a marketing guy. A new band is difficult to sell. An established one is much easier."
> **Phil Carson**

Tony Kaye and Trevor Rabin in the spotlight at the Rosemont Horizon, Rosemont, Illinois, March 8, 1984.

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

## The Songs That Didn't Make It

Eighteen months passed between the first Cinema rehearsals and the end of recording *90125*. Although many songs were rehearsed, and even recorded, not all of them made the final album.

### TIME

This long track is one of the most famous 'lost' Yes pieces. Rabin explains: "It's on a Reevox somewhere; I think Alan had it. *Time* was kind of successful, but we never put it on the album. It would have included *Cinema*." Very few copies of the demo exist, although those who have heard it suggest that it may not be the lost classic its reputation implies.

### MAKE IT EASY

This is the best-known of the outtakes, as it first appeared on the *Yesyears* box set in 1991. An excellent Trevor Rabin song, very much in the style of his solo material, its intro is well known, having been played live many times by Rabin incarnations of the band as the opening to *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*. Despite many attempts to place the song, including as part of *Time*, it never found a resting place on *90125*.

### IT'S OVER

A Rabin song with a Zeppelin-esque riff and a neo-classical section that hints at prog without fully embracing it, this is another track in the mould of solo Rabin. It's good, though doesn't feel suitable for Jon Anderson's voice, which might explain its exclusion from the finished album.

### RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT

While the band were in Air Studios in London, this song was recorded but not considered good enough for the album. It did live on, however, as Alan White's drum part was looped by engineer Gary Langan for the hit Art Of Noise track, *Beatbox*.

### CARRY ON

An up-tempo Rabin-sung track that was rehearsed by Cinema. It was one of the three songs played to Yes fans and record executives when they came down to see the band play at John Henrys rehearsal studio in London, in 1982.

### OPEN YOUR DOORS

Whereas much of what didn't make the final cut originally came from Rabin, this unusual piece was sung by Chris Squire. It's very much in the style of early 1980s pop, with electronic drums and an insistent, funky guitar line. It sounds nothing like Yes. **SL**

At this point, the band remained unsigned. Phil Carson was still financing the entire venture himself, and both Kaye and Rabin, who had homes in California, were living with him in London.

"Nobody at Atlantic in the USA gave a shit," Carson remembers of his mentorship of Cinema. "They didn't stop me doing it, but they were totally against it."

But there was more turbulence to come. Horn was growing gradually more dissatisfied with Kaye's performance in the studio, and after a lengthy session trying to record the Hammond solo for *Hearts*, Horn snapped. Recording was paused while arguments raged, but in the end, the producer got his way, and Kaye returned to the USA. Rabin, who remained loyal to Kaye — but who had also shown his considerable prowess when he suggested a part for *Changes* to Horn — was then enlisted to play most of the keyboards on the album. Horn insisted that he wasn't trying to fire Kaye from the band, only the *90125* sessions, but understandably, Kaye took it hard and quit.

Recording continued nonetheless and the album was completed. However, with Carson still financing everything, the idea of getting Jon Anderson back into the band began to gain traction. Horn and Carson were in favour, while Squire and White were resistant, although Carson insisted that the band were a much better commercial prospect with Anderson on board. Feelers went out and an approach was formulated. Carson, who had always had a good relationship with Anderson, was the first to make contact but didn't have a current number for the vocalist.

"I got hold of Jon's roadie, who said that Anderson was in a call box on the King's Road in Chelsea waiting for a call from him right there and then. He gave me the number and I called Jon instead. Even though there had been a lot of bad blood, Jon expressed interest but demanded that Chris call him." Squire took some persuading but eventually agreed.

"Chris called me and wanted me to hear some of the music he'd been making," recalls Anderson, who

## The Video Age

Yes and promotional clips were always uneasy bedfellows. But in 1983, with MTV all-important, the band had no choice but to embrace the video revolution, with varying results...

Yes filmed four videos to promote the singles from *90125*. For *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*, Storm Thorgerson of Hipgnosis was selected to direct. Teasing us with a live performance of the first verse and chorus, we are then plunged into an expansive dystopian thriller featuring British character actor Danny Webb. The band, including a guest appearance from Eddie Jobson, are involved, transforming into animals. It's wildly expensive and pretentious as hell, but even so, it's been viewed 47 million times on YouTube. With Kaye back, a second video for the song was filmed on the cheap; this time the band performed in a studio desert set. With the budget stretching only to four stuffed parrots, this version seems to have been disowned by everyone, with good reason.

With the third single *It Can Happen* given a more conventional 80s performance approach, the middle release *Leave It* saw Yes move to a single-day studio shoot with award-winning video pioneers Lol Creme and Kevin Godley. In a mixture of bold creativity and tongue-in-cheek performance art, the directors shot the band standing side-by-side in grey suits while they lip-synced to the song 18 times in one day. But there were bizarrely subtle variations to each take, so while version 11 is the mix generally available, another has Tony Kaye wearing a pink tie rather than a grey one, while yet another features Anderson alone. Godley and Creme gave each version a bizarre, Pythonesque name, such as *Tribute To Jeremy* (version three); *Endless Infatuations* (version four); *Surgeon's Dilemma* (version eight); and *Lords Of The Galaxy* (version 10).

"The basis of this video is one shot," said Creme at the time, "with the band intentionally made to look as bland and undemonstrative as possible. Your perception of the video will be altered because it will be upside down." He's not wrong. The directors initially wanted to hang the band themselves upside down, but much to their relief, the idea was scuppered by Rabin's ongoing recovery from the spleen operation, which had already delayed the *90125* tour.

MTV showed the variations one per day, leading up to a broadcast of 15 back-to-back on April 1, 1984. One take, shot late in the day, has the band miming to the entire song with their backs to the camera, during which the directors quietly usher the crew out. When the band turn around, the studio is empty save for a cameraman. They take the joke in their stride; Anderson can be heard giving a single-word response: "Beautiful." **SL**

Anderson chats to MTV's JJ Jackson during an interview at MTV Studios, New York, in August 1982.

GARY GERSHOFF/GETTY IMAGE

was in London visiting family at the time. "We sat in Chris' Bentley and he played me some of the songs. It was clear that Trevor Rabin could play, and I was impressed that Trevor Horn was on board as I'd liked *Duck Rock*. Chris played me *Owner...* and asked me if I'd like to come in the day after to sing it and work on the verses, as they hadn't got them together at that point."

Anderson obliged and went to the studio to track the vocals. "I told Chris that it sounded a bit like Yes. To which Chris said, 'That's why you're here.'"

After a difficult meeting with Horn, who had replaced him on *Drama*, Anderson agreed to come on board.

"I spent two or three weeks working on the album, adding bits here and there, especially on *Hearts*, which I really like," he remembers.

Despite Cinema's updated line-up, Rabin still has a strong vocal presence on the album, particularly on *Owner...*, *Changes* and *Leave It*. Squire is showcased on the song he originated, *It Can Happen*, and also *Changes*, where his harmony vocals with Anderson are enough to melt any old Yes fan's heart. Anderson says that Rabin's vocal role "was mainly diplomatic" since Rabin had written so much of the material, but Rabin was initially shocked to have Anderson involved.

Rabin remembers telling them: "'To rephrase what you're saying, you want to fire me as the singer?' I meant it semi-tongue-in-cheek. I've never been too proud or jealous about being the singer."

Ever the pragmatist, he saw the sense in handing the vocals over to Anderson. Now that Anderson was in the band and *Owner...* was in the can, Carson was desperate to get Atlantic on board too and was ready to play the track to label boss Ahmet Ertegun, but it wasn't as easy as he hoped.

"Fortunately, Ahmet was visiting Paris," Carson recalls. "I grabbed a cassette of the track and sent it to the Paris office. I told Ahmet I was going to be on the next plane. So I got to his hotel and all we had to play it on was this tiny cassette player. It wasn't even a boom box; it was a mono player. To make matters worse, the battery was pretty flat so the tape kept skipping."

In the end, Ertegun liked what he heard, to Carson's immense relief.

"He believed what I was saying about the band's potential, agreed to sign them and I got all the money I'd invested back, much to the displeasure of the hierarchy at Atlantic USA."

The final mixes for the album were completed without Tony Kaye. Cinema needed a keyboard player, and quickly, so Eddie Jobson, a virtuoso player with an excellent pedigree having been in Roxy Music, UK and, most recently, Jethro Tull, was approached. Although he remained in the band very briefly, he appears in many of the promotional photographs at the time and is discussed in glowing terms by former Yes members, especially Anderson.

Now that the album and the line-up had been finalised, there came the issue of artwork. A traditional Roger Dean cover was never considered; instead artist Garry Mouat, who had already worked with Trevor Horn and specialised in computer-generated art, was asked to produce a contemporary new cover design. Such a bold image was considered appropriate, as his style fitted in with the modern production techniques the band were using sonically. When he created the first image, the band were still called Cinema, so the grey Y that is wrapped around the middle ellipse was originally missing its tail and was on its side, creating the C of Cinema.

Initially, the album was to have a traditional title, but in keeping with the radical, minimalist tone, the record was simply named after its catalogue number, that being *80102*. However, when Carson realised that the number was not available across all territories, *90125* became the title.

With the name Cinema starting to gain traction, several other bands smelled big bucks and tried to sue, although, as Rabin noted, they never tried to sue each other. For a short while, the band were also to be called Ice, but ultimately reverting to Yes was a far simpler option.

*Owner Of A Lonely Heart* was the obvious lead single for the new-look Yes. The Storm Thorgerson-directed

Jobson out of Yes

YES have announced that Eddie Jobson (above) will not be joining them on tour after all. Jobson, who only linked up with the band a few weeks ago, has decided to continue to pursue his solo career instead.

The upshot is that original Yes keyboard player Tony Kaye, who appears on the band's '90125' album, will be joining them permanently. There are no touring plans finalised as yet but they are likely to tour America before Europe.

Unfortunately the news of Jobson's departure came too late to be included in the *Sounds* Yes feature. See centre pages.

DAVID WATKINSON

A news item in *Sounds* announcing Jobson's sudden departure.

> "Eddie was a great player, but he was not a big enough name. We needed to get Tony back."
> **Phil Carson**

Yes with gold records at Ahoy, Rotterdam on July 1, 1984. L-R: Alan White, Jon Anderson, Hans Tonino (of WEA/ Warner Records), Tony Kaye, Trevor Rabin, Chris Squire.

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

video was filmed in London with Jobson included in the shoot. Once the initial promotion had finished, Jobson returned to his home in the USA to prepare for the tour. But Carson, who hadn't been involved in the decision to fire Kaye from the recording sessions, wasn't happy with the situation. He'd played no role in bringing in Jobson and was concerned whether the keyboard player was suitable for the band.

"Eddie was a great player, but he wasn't a big enough name. We needed to get Tony back," Carsons says.

Kaye was approached and agreed to return. According to Jobson, he was told that not only would there now be two keyboard players but that his rig had already been designed without consulting him. He decided to move on.

*Owner Of A Lonely Heart* was released in late October 1983 and started a slow rise up the US charts, finally reaching the No.1 spot for two weeks in January 1984. While it only hit the top spot in the USA, the single did well in most other territories, although in the UK and Ireland it was a relatively small hit, reaching No.28 and No.30 respectively. With a rather unpleasant "maggot" scene removed and Jobson now out of the band, all his scenes were cut from Thorgerson's video, except for a couple of glimpses.

The single's release was followed by *90125* itself, which was a huge success. It reached No.5 in the US Billboard 200 and No.16 in the UK album chart, good for a territory in which the band were still considered to be unfashionable rock dinosaurs. Two further singles were released: *Leave It*, a hit in the USA, with a video by Godley and Creme, and *It Can Happen*, with a more conventional (if very 80s) performance video. Bold dance remixes were also created for *Owner...* and *Leave It* to appear on the 12-inch versions.

Although released on CD later in 1984, *90125* is a masterwork of sequencing for vinyl. It hits the listener hard with the big single and follows it up with the bombast of *Hold On*, created from a combination of sections from two Rabin demos. Despite the 80s hard-rock vibe, there are plenty of Yes-isms in this track, particularly in the complex à capella vocal passage before the final chorus. Squire's *It Can Happen*, which stems from the Cinema rehearsal period, is one song that took on a new life when Anderson became involved. The Cinema version was released on the *Yesyears* box set in 1991, and the contrast is remarkable with Squire's conventional verse replaced by something a lot more surreal, building tension which is released by the Squire-sung chorus. This combination of Anderson's lyrics and Horn's production gives the song an extra boost that was missing from the Cinema version. Side one ends in epic fashion with the show-stopping *Changes*. Rabin's demo contains the basic verse and chorus, while the song's proggy mallet percussion opening section was written by White and embellished by the band, the song further enhanced by Anderson's pensive middle eight. Outside *Owner...*, *Changes* remains the best-loved track on *90125* and with good reason.

The album's cover, designed by computer whiz Garry Mouat.

Side two opens with the instrumental *Cinema*, recorded live with Kaye still on board, before the second single, *Leave It*. This was the last song to be written for the album, mainly by Squire and Rabin, and is the only piece without live drums. Anderson has no writing credit, but his percussive lead vocal in the second verse contrasts beautifully with Rabin's smoother tones in the first. *Our Song*, also much rehearsed by Cinema, is made glorious by Anderson's lead vocal over the band's mobile arrangement. Rabin's *City Of Love*, written about his accidental trip to the wrong address in Harlem in New York, is the heaviest Yes ever got, but features a powerful vocal melody and performance

from Anderson. The album closes with another epic in *Hearts*, which developed from a keyboard idea by Kaye but features the starkest contrast between Rabin's hard-rock style and Anderson's free-form lyrics. It really shouldn't work, but it does.

Anderson's contributions are fairly easy to spot, not just via his distinctive vocals but also in his melodies and lyrics. Of the nine tracks, he manages seven writing credits, which isn't too bad for three weeks of work. But Horn must take huge credit for balancing all these elements into something that worked across the entire album. As an exercise in banging square pegs into round holes, it's remarkable.

It was inevitable that the band would tour in support of the album and this involved visiting the sort of venues that Yes had traditionally played in the 1970s – big arenas in the USA, with a similar schedule in Europe planned for the summer of 1984. The audio system was designed by Clair Brothers, the US-based audio company that had worked with the band in the 1970s. Cash was thrown at the visuals, too. Yes were truly back in the big time.

But there were a couple more stings in the tail. The early dates of the tour, planned for late January 1984, were postponed when Rabin suffered an unfortunate injury.

"My wife and I went to Florida just before the tour, and I had an accident in a swimming pool," he remembers. "A woman came down a slide and hit me, which led to my spleen being removed. We'd decided to celebrate as we'd just heard that *Owner...* had gone to No.1 and that the album was Top 5. So the tour was delayed."

Rabin took a few weeks to recuperate, which also meant time off from practice. "In the meantime, I'd barely played the guitar, and I certainly hadn't played any of the older Yes stuff," he says. "I had never wanted to call the band Yes in the first place, so now I was stuck with playing some of the old Yes tunes in what I considered to be a new band. Chris reassured me, 'You choose what you want to play.' On the plane to rehearse in Philadelphia, I came up with some ideas. I was concerned that my guitar style was totally different from Steve Howe's, so Chris also said, 'You do it your way. It'll make the band sound like its own thing.' That made me feel warmer, and it made the tour much easier."

With Yes rehearsing and the setlist chosen, another problem arose. The songs were too memory-hungry for one keyboardist, so enter Casey Young: an award-winning synthesiser-player with a growing portfolio of clients and a reputation for creative rig creation. He had been brought in to design Kaye's keyboard set-up so that they could play the songs from *90125* accurately. However, not only had Kaye's presets become overloaded, but he could only play so much with the two hands at his disposal. Squire, ever the opportunist, suggested a surprised Young. After further persuasion from Anderson, Young agreed to "run away with the circus" and join the band on tour, his rig set up underneath the stage. Young's position below decks came about more for practical reasons than for egotistical ones, since the stage set, stark and sleek in the 1980s style, had already been designed by this point. Later in the tour, when the band played open-air shows on other people's stages, Young played on the same level as the band, if somewhat apart.

What Young actually played developed over time. Initially, he was mainly triggering vocal enhancements, such as on *Changes*, but when Anderson suggested he acquire a vocoder, he had parts thrown at him constantly.

**"I had never really wanted to call the band Yes in the first place, so now I was stuck with playing some of the old Yes tunes in what I considered to be a new band."**
**Trevor Rabin**

KPA/UNITED ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES

**The band appearing on a German show in 1984. Bet they got sand in their shoes.**

Anderson sometimes asked him to play new parts with a minute's notice and he often had to double Rabin's guitar lines, which took some concentration. Young was grateful not to have to "perform" as the other musicians were required to. Indeed, while for most of the band playing these shows was in their DNA, for Rabin it was something of a culture shock that saw him overcompensating early on in the tour.

"After the first gig, I remember Nu Nu Whiting saying that I should have a satchel [as in AC/DC's Angus Young style] as I'd been jumping around so much," he says. "So I calmed down a bit after that."

The setlist for the 9012Live tour remained fairly static, but songs moved around and the terrific *Our Song* wandered in and out. But the rest of the album was featured in a well-balanced show. Proceedings began with *Cinema* segueing into *Leave It* (with White playing electronic drums), followed by the more bombastic *Hold On*. Initially played towards the end of the set, *Hearts* was later switched to the first half, with the show-stopping *Changes* played mid-way through. *Owner...* and *It Can Happen* were performed late on, with an extended *City Of Love* often closing the main set. *Starship Trooper* was sometimes played before the inevitable encore of *Roundabout*. The older material was mainly taken from 1971's *The Yes Album*. This made sense since they were the pieces that Kaye had last played on with Yes, but were also the songs that best suited Rabin, who has always professed a love for *Perpetual Change* in particular. Only *And You And I* and the encore represented other areas of the band beyond Anderson and Squire's solo sections. Squire and White's *Whitefish* would include *The Fish* (as usual) but also segments of *Tempus Fugit* from *Drama* and *Sound Chaser* from *Relayer*, while Anderson would sing *Soon*.

The initial leg of the tour took in North America from February to May 1984, and after a few weeks' break, the band reconvened in Europe for the summer, arriving in the UK in July. A further two-month jaunt around the USA and Canada up to October was followed by the first Rock In Rio at the purpose-built Citade Do Rock in Rio de Janeiro early in 1985. Almost 1.4 million people attended this 10-day festival, which saw Yes, Queen, George Benson, Rod Stewart and AC/DC each headline two nights. After further dates in Uruguay and Argentina, the tour officially came to an end in February, a year after it had started.

The shows were documented in a somewhat strange fashion; the VHS *9012Live* was released later in 1985. Directed by Steven Soderbergh, who would go on to fame later in the decade as a movie director, the video captured a well-shot, if shortened, version of the shows from Edmonton, Canada in September 1984 and combined the live performance with video effects and vintage movie footage in a way that has dated badly. This footage, and that from another show from Dortmund earlier on the tour, gives a good example of the scale and excitement of these performances. Anderson, Squire and White's stage personae are well represented, despite their bold attire, with Squire in particularly fine form. Kaye also oozes charisma. "On stage, he was perfect for the band," says Rabin.

However, it's the guitarist who steals the show, his youthful persona very different from Steve Howe's more studious stage character. On *City Of Love* he's particularly effective, and it's obvious that playing Howe's parts in his own style on the older songs offered him no particular difficulties.

An accompanying live LP, *9012Live: The Solos* features good live versions of *Hold On* and *Changes*, and then all the solo spots from the five musicians. This was an odd choice, to put it mildly, perhaps designed as a companion piece to the VHS rather than a standalone live album in its own right. Better might have been an album that featured the songs that didn't make it onto the video, such as *Yours Is No Disgrace*, *Hearts* or *Roundabout*. Or even better, a traditional double live album documenting most of the set.

Did *90125* save Yes? The answer seems clear. Rabin has always felt the album would have still done well had it been released as Cinema and without Anderson, and Carson believes *Owner...* was good enough to be a hit without the Yes vocalist. However a record deal was far from certain until the very last minute. Although Anderson's solo career at that point had hardly set the charts alight, his work with Vangelis had produced two hit albums and two big hit singles in *I Hear You Now* and *I'll Find My Way Home*. Anderson was a commercial bet, not just because he was the previous lead vocalist of Yes but because he was still in the public eye. Nonetheless, there's little doubt that the fairy dust he sprinkled over the album enhanced it creatively as well as commercially, even though Carson is surely the unsung hero of *90125*, personally bankrolling Cinema for many months.

Without *90125* it's possible that Yes might well have reformed eventually, like so many bands from the 1970s. However, it's also very likely that the album's success and the additional fans it generated, many of whom went back and discovered earlier material, gave the group a shot in the arm that remains in their immune system today.

Despite the very 1980s production techniques and a certain antipathy, even snobbery, among some fans of the 1970s era towards the 1980s version of Yes in general, the album has aged remarkably well. Like all the best music from that colourful decade, it's the material that ensures its longevity. There isn't one poor track on the album, and the way it's sequenced makes it a wonderful one-sitting listen.

For Rabin, this period in his life remains one he remembers fondly: "To this day, I really miss Chris and Alan; the three-piece juggernaut, as I used to call us. I just loved playing with them."

*90125* was a product of its time, but its success is the result of a unique combination of creativity, commercial savvy and good fortune. Happy 40th anniversary!

*Yessingles is out now via Rhino. The Classic Tales Of Yes Tour resumes in 2024. See www.yesworld.com for dates.*

# Lucky For Some

By his own admission, when **Fish** originally released *13th Star* in 2007, his life was a mess. Broke, directionless and dumped just before his wedding, the Scottish singer-songwriter was close to rock-bottom but had turned his frustration and grief into an album that contains some of his finest solo material. To coincide with the record's deluxe reissue, Fish looks back on the turmoil that inspired it.

**Words:** Dave Everley **Images:** Tony Marsh

Fish wants to make something clear.

"If you go on Wikipedia, it goes, 'Blah blah blah… It's about the end of a relationship.' But it wasn't about that. It was about me, about a time in my life when I was just lost. Absolutely fucking lost."

The singer is speaking to *Prog* via Zoom from his home-come-studio in East Lothian. The 'it' he's referring to is *13th Star*, his ninth solo album and 13th in total, including the four he made with Marillion. Originally released in 2007 and just reissued in deluxe box set form, the narrative around it is that it's Fish's 'break-up record', written about his brief, turbulent relationship with then-Mostly Autumn singer Heather Findlay, which ended dramatically a few months before their planned wedding.

There's an element of truth in that, but it's also far from the whole story. Fish had actually been wandering in the wilderness personally, professionally and financially for a good few years prior to *13th Star* and the break-up that would inadvertently come to define it. Listening to it today, it crackles with pain, anger and desperation. *'I'm running out of options, I'm running out of road, got no sense of direction, sliding out of control,'* he muttered ominously on the spoken-word

**“It was about me, about a time in my life when I was just lost. Absolutely fucking lost.”**

Fish turned a fiery period of his life into a fine, fiery album.

introduction to *Openwater*, which encapsulates his life at the time.

"I was a broken person," he says now. "It's an album about navigation and trying to find my way. The open sea, the stars, compass points… Those things were all over it."

With hindsight, the big man's career had been an uphill struggle since it began. The release of his debut solo album, 1990's *Vigil In A Wilderness Of Mirrors*, was delayed to allow his ex-bandmates to get out of the gate ahead of him with *Seasons End*, their first record with new singer Steve Hogarth. Since then he'd endured a bumpy ride at the hands of the music industry, prompting him to establish his own labels, Dick Bros Recording Company and, later, Chocolate Frog Records, to give him some sort of control over his music and career.

By the mid-2000s, that struggle had become even more difficult. A costly divorce from his first wife at the start of the decade had almost wiped him out financially. No less devastating was the discovery in early 2005 that his office manager had been siphoning off mail-order payments into a separate account she'd set up. Fish was awarded £168,000 in damages after filing a civil suit against her.

"She disappeared," he says. "It was a fucking mess. But the way I look at things, if you just fall to the floor and lie there, you're just going to take a kicking. I had to stand up and fight my way through it the best way I could."

Fish had always channelled the drama in his life into his music; this would be no exception. The idea for the album that became *13th Star* began swirling around his head in 2006, shaped by recent circumstances in his life. There were the financial body blows he'd taken, but also a more general sense that he was stuck in an endless loop that was leading nowhere. His most recent albums, 2001's *Fellini Days* and 2003's *A Field Of Crows*, had barely moved the needle career-wise, and while the Return To Childhood tour, which found him revisiting Marillion's 1985 album *Misplaced Childhood*, was hugely successful, even that felt like being stuck on a hamster wheel, doing the same thing over and over. Then there were the relationships he'd embarked on in the wake of his divorce that had led nowhere.

"My life had no direction," he says. "I was lost personally, without a shadow of a doubt. And from a writing perspective, I knew that's what I wanted to write about: being lost."

The period around *13th Star* at least provided two fixed compass points. Bassist Steve Vantsis had been playing in Fish's band since 1999's *Raingods With Zippos*, though he hadn't been directly involved in the songwriting process. But now the singer needed someone to step up on that front, and Vantsis proved the perfect person for the job.

"When he started coming up with ideas, I thought, 'Wait a minute, I can work with these,'" says Fish. "He was bringing in lovely little acoustic riffs and bits and pieces, but at the same time he was bringing in different stuff — loops and sequencers."

The other steadying force in the process was producer Calum Malcolm, who had made his name working with The Blue Nile, Prefab Sprout and Hue And Cry. When Fish had set up his home studio, Funny Farm, in 1991, he'd turned to Malcolm for advice, and the latter had done some mastering work for him. When previous producer Elliot Ness moved to Israel, Malcolm was the ideal replacement.

Grinning and bearing it back in 2006.

PRESS/FISH ARCHIVES

"Calum's a beautiful person, he's not somebody you ever get angry with," says Fish. "He was a good buffer between Steve and me, because things did get prickly at times, especially as we got into the later stages of writing and the relationship exploded."

**"Regrets are a waste of time. You learn from your mistakes, and that's what I did there."**

There was one other key presence in the period leading up to *13th Star*. Fish met Heather Findlay at an awards ceremony in December 2005, and their initial flirting soon turned into a relationship.

"After my divorce, I'd bounced around these hole-in-the-heart relationships," he recalls. "I needed stability. But the one thing I know now is never get involved with someone when you're trying to fill a hole in yourself. It's the worst thing you can do, and that's what I did."

So it proved. Foreshadowing the turbulence to come, their relationship ended after a few months (Fish, 19 years older than Findlay and already the father of a teenage daughter, puts this down to his reluctance to commit to having children with his new partner). But by the end of 2006, their relationship was back on, and even more intense than before. On Valentine's Day 2007, he proposed to Heather Findlay on Micklegate in York. She accepted, and a wedding date was set for August. Suddenly, it seemed like Fish had found the direction he craved.

Musically, too, things were moving forwards. The singer and Steve Vantsis had been working on several of the songs that would appear on *13th Star*, among them the album's eventual opening track, *Circle Line*, which found the singer using the titular London Underground

A visit to Egypt's Valley Of The Kings shaped the album's title.

With Steve Vantsis in the studio in May 2007.

PRESS/FISH ARCHIVES

PRESS/FISH ARCHIVES

route as a stand-in for the frustrating lack of direction in his own life, and the powerful yet graceful love song *Arc Of The Curve*, which today stands as one of Fish's finest solo songs.

Two of Fish's lyrics were inspired by a holiday he and Findlay had taken to Egypt during the first part of their relationship. *Manchmal* (German for 'sometimes') was based on the old fable of the turtle and the scorpion, in which the former carries the latter across a river, only for the scorpion to sting it halfway across.

"That would become very relevant," he says, drily.

The other song sparked by their Egyptian trip was *13th Star* itself. Fish's lyric was inspired by the yellow stars he'd seen painted on the blue roofs of the ancient tombs in the Valley Of The Kings — a direct connection to the theme of navigation and direction that would come to define the album. He later claimed that the number 13 represented the 13 women he'd had significant relationships with in his life.

"Ah, that was bollocks," he says now. "It was something I made up for the press. It worked, though. Plus 13 is my lucky number."

Except it didn't seem so lucky this time. Sessions with musicians including regular Fish guitarist Frank Usher, Mostly Autumn guitarist Chris Johnson and keyboard player Foss Paterson, plus Vantsis and producer Calum Malcolm, were due to begin on June 4, 2007. However, things were thrown into turmoil just a couple of weeks before that when Findlay walked out on both Fish and their relationship.

Talking about it today — and writing about it extensively in the liner notes to the *13th Star* reissue — Fish says he should have seen it coming. Theirs was a tumultuous relationship, swinging between passion and tension. There were frequent arguments. The final straw, says Fish, was when he asked his fiancée to sign a prenuptial agreement. She refused. When he brought up the issue again, Heather announced she was calling off the wedding.

With the recording of *13th Star* due to begin in just a couple of weeks, Fish had two options: cancel the sessions or plough on regardless. Cancelling was never going to happen.

***13th Star*, reissued and shining afresh.**

"After the relationship exploded, I was not in a good state of mind. Trying to get my head around writing an album was difficult, and Steve was an anchor in the studio. He could have walked away and said, 'I'll come back in three months when you're over this.' But it was a case of: 'No, we've got to make an album.'"

Mired in the misery that comes in the aftermath of a break-up, Fish retreated to his greenhouse — nicknamed The Bluehouse "because it was painted blue, not because I was blue" — to finish off lyrics. "I'd take CDs out there and listen to them," he says. "Just me on my own with a bit of paper."

Some of the new lyrics he came up with seemed to reflect the tumult in his life. *Where In The World* predated the split, but changed to become a portrait of someone paralysed by loss. It begins with the line, '*This time last year I was in love...*' before seemingly addressing his break-up: '*Before I knew it you had disappeared/ Without a word, you stole my dream.*'

"I did feel self-conscious about that lyric," he admits now. "It was very self-pitying."

Other songs took on a different cast, not least *Square Go* ('*My soul a glacier, I move alone*'), which was written from the perspective of a disillusioned ex-squaddie but could have easily been a snapshot of Fish's own mindset at the time.

It wasn't all darkness and despair. *Zoë 25*, originally titled *Micklegate* after the place where Fish had proposed to Findlay, was his attempt to capture the same sense of transient love that Ray Davies did with The Kinks' *Waterloo Sunset*. The title character was inspired by the Page 3 girl Zoë McConnell, who he'd spotted in a copy of *The Sun* that had been left lying around the studio, resulting in a song that played out like a more sweet-hearted, less desolate update of the Marillion song *Chelsea Monday*. (Fish tracked down and met the real-life Zoë, who politely declined to appear in the video for the single.)

Mostly, though, *13th Star* was an album of emotional synchronicity. Fish's attempt to write a record that reflected the directionless state of his life had been reflected back on him.

"It just matched up," he says. "A lot of these things were already in place, then something comes along that colours it in a different way, gives it a different perspective."

Nor was the turbulence that shaped his life over. Towards the end of the tour in support of the album, he discovered he had a growth on his vocal cords, necessitating surgery. And then there was the short "joke" of a marriage to a woman he'd met in Vietnam ("Talk about being on the fucking rebound," he says). The flip side is that the same period also saw him reconnect with an old German friend, Simone, whom he'd first met in the 1980s. By 2010, they were in a relationship and married seven years later; they're still together.

And *13th Star* itself? He says he has no idea what Findlay thought of it: they've not spoken since the end of their relationship.

"I don't even know if she's listened to it," he says.

For all the tumult that surrounded it, Fish himself remains proud of the album.

"Regrets are a waste of time," he says. "You learn from your mistakes, and that's what I did there."

*13th Star (2023 Remix) is out now via Chocolate Frog. See fishmusic.scot for more information.*

# Tales From The Bar

Magenta's lead singer **Christina Booth** is back with a new solo album, *Bar Stool Prophet*. Emotional and uplifting, haunting and lyrical, the album's 10 tracks explore themes ranging from politics, war and religion to ageing, life and death. *Prog* catches up with Booth to discover more about the inspiration behind her latest music.

**Words:** Francesca Tyer

"For me, music transcends everything," begins Magenta's Christina Booth. "It has the ability to connect people and brings a sense of hope."

The Welsh vocalist and singer-songwriter recently released her long-awaited third solo album, *Bar Stool Prophet*. Its 10 songs' various themes are tied together by the belief that it's never too late to alter the course of one's life — and that concept is encapsulated by the final track, *Rise Again*. With an emotionally charged harmonica solo by Steve Hackett (yes, *that* Steve Hackett), the spine-tingling composition is one of Booth's favourites.

"No matter what, you pick yourself up and get on with it," she explains of the lyrics. "There's always something better around the corner. I put a lot of myself into the lyrics, though they're not always about things that have happened to me."

**New album *Bar Stool Prophet*, almost a decade in the making.**

Booth composed *Bar Stool Prophet*'s title track following the death of a friend, and her lyrics explore the dark side of alcohol and the damage it can cause.

"Within a couple of minutes of knowing that he'd died, I started writing the song," she recalls. "His death made me think about people we've lost over the years through alcohol. Drinking is part of our culture in the UK and it's celebrated, which is fine, but it also ruins lives."

It's not the only song with emotional undertones on the album. *Riptide* is about her sister's near-drowning experience, and *Sail On Sister Geneviève* is inspired by the death of a 28-year-old woman from leukaemia. The creation of these songs, and of the entire album, was not only a cathartic experience for the singer-songwriter, but also a way to connect with her listeners in meaningful ways.

"I share a lot of what I feel through songwriting," she reveals. "A problem is made a lot easier by sharing it. It's such a powerful thing to make a connection with people."

Booth's own connection with music developed in early childhood. She recalls performing for family members and, in later years, attending punk concerts with her sister. It took some time, however, before her own singing abilities were realised.

"I loved to sing, even when I was very young. I didn't really discover that I could sing, or that people would want to listen to me, until I was 19 or 20."

Booth reflects on the extent to which her parents' musical tastes influenced her own. She recalls her mother listening to Ella Fitzgerald and her father to Johnny Mathis, among others.

"It was a lot of the old singers," she explains. "I still love that kind of music, but I'll listen to anything if I like it. If you limit yourself to one kind of music, you're going to miss out."

Despite her passion for music, Booth never undertook any formal vocal training, but did receive some vocal support while struggling with coughing fits during the recording of Magenta's second album, *Seven*.

> "I share a lot of what I feel through songwriting — a problem is made a lot easier by sharing it. It's such a powerful thing to make a connection with people."

The pure, lilting quality of Booth's voice exposes the layers of emotion behind her harmonies and lyrics. She speaks about the darker side of her music and her desire to blend those heavier melodies and themes with something more uplifting.

"I find it easier to write melancholy songs," she confesses. "Happier songs sound a bit twee when I do them. I hope the emotion comes through in my songs. However, even if some have dark undertones, I try to bring hope."

Cathartic artist: Christina Booth writes and sings from the heart.

"I lost my confidence and had singing lessons for a couple of months to reassure me that I wasn't damaging my voice," she says.

The voice *is* a fragile muscle, especially when strained due to a lack of practice or unavoidable factors like illness or ageing, and the latter is a theme explored in the track *Breakthrough*.

"Your voice changes as you get older – you have to adapt," Booth states. "I'm still raging that my body won't respond the way it used to, but there are good things as well. You become more accepting."

Booth also refers to the strain put on her voice during her breast cancer treatment nearly 10 years ago and, more recently, because of Covid.

Alongside guest performances from Steve Hackett, she's joined by Chimpan A's Steve Balsamo and Magenta pals Dan Nelson, Jiffy Griffiths, Chris Fry and long-term collaborator and multi-instrumentalist Rob Reed.

"I usually start by scribbling lyric ideas down and then I work around the vocal melody," she reveals of working with Reed. "I'm ashamed that I don't play an instrument well enough to do my own complete composition. I then hand the music over to Rob and he'll start building on it and then we'll work through it together."

Booth met Reed through mutual friend Robert Cottle and the pair started working together under the banner of Trippa. She

"At one point, I didn't have the desire to sing at all, the record deal experience spoiled it," Booth recalls. "The gig restored my faith. This, to me, was what music was about."

With *Bar Stool Prophet* out now, she's ramping up the promotion and has set her sights on some live shows. She also has plans to explore new ways of working.

"I'm hoping to write with a few other people. I love working with Rob but I wonder what it would be like to try something else, to push me out of my comfort zone. I want to do something with my sister. We had an acoustic band years ago, the Sisters Of Murphy. Murphy was our maiden name."

"Music is still a mystery to me," says Booth. But who doesn't love a good mystery, eh?

## "I find it easier to write melancholy songs. Happier songs sound a bit twee when I do them."

"All of us were inactive – you could sing as much as you wanted around the house, but it wasn't the same."

Although she launched her solo career in 2010 with *Broken Lives & Bleeding Hearts*, its follow-up, *The Light*, wasn't released until 2015 and *Bar Stool Prophet* has been nearly a decade in the making. First conceived in 2018, its release was pushed back due to the pandemic, creating a distance between the original demos.

"I almost had to acquaint myself with the tracks, even though I'd written the lyrics. It was bizarre," she says.

explains how close they were to securing a record deal before things started to fall apart.

"It's one of those things you look back on and wonder what really happened there. I was asked to lie about my age and I just thought, 'I can't be doing this anymore.' It wasn't fun."

Despite this, the record deal falling through led Booth and Reed on to new adventures. Reed invited Booth to do some vocals for his then-studio project Cyan, and shortly afterwards, Magenta were born. Two years after the release of their 2001 debut album, *Revolutions*, they were invited to perform their first official show at Baja Prog, a festival in Mexico.

Booth's passion for music shines through in her new material. Music still holds great power, one that she seeks to share with her listeners.

"Music is still a mystery to me," she says. "A song can take you back to a particular moment. You might not understand the language a song is in, but it can bring people together. It lets them know they are not alone. I've made great friends around the world through music."

*Bar Stool Prophet is out now via Tigermoth Records. See www.tigermothshop.co.uk for more information.*

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# MISSION Critical

When Gong's founder Daevid Allen died in 2015, many of the veteran act's fans assumed they were gone for good – but the truth is that the Kavus Torabi-led **Gong** are better than ever, just as Allen knew they would be. "He always loved to throw a grenade into situations!" says Torabi, beckoning us into the caverns of the mind.

**Turning the Allen key:** Joel McIver **Portrait:** Layla Burrows

"Do I ever feel any pressure? Only if I read comments on the internet!" jokes Kavus Torabi, singer and guitarist with Gong, the psychedelic act and later prog-rock institution founded in 1969 by Daevid Allen. Before he died – or decoupled from the physical realm, as he would no doubt have put it – Allen tasked Torabi and the band with taking Gong to the next level, wherever in the universe that might be. Of course, not every Gong fan agrees with that decision.

"Every single person who likes Gong, whether that's old Gong or new Gong, will have their own take on what the band should be," continues Torabi. "I'm the same about the bands that I like, so I get it. At the same time, you have to be confident about what you're doing, and we are. Fabio Golfetti, our guitarist, has been working with Daevid since the 80s. He's really grounded and really aware, so if Fabio thinks something is good, I know it's good."

Not that the new band have anything to worry about on that score. Since Allen succumbed to cancer eight years ago, Torabi and Golfetti – plus bassist David Sturt, sax/flute player Ian East and drummer Cheb Nettles – have fulfilled their late boss's wishes with ease. *Unending Ascending* is the Torabi-fronted band's fourth album without Allen: even more so than its enjoyably surreal predecessors, it pays deft homage to the original Gong sound.

Anyone familiar with the beautifully warped Radio Gnome Trilogy albums from Allen's imperial period – *Flying Teapot* (1973), *Angel's Egg* (also '73) and *You* (1974) – will hear echoes from that far-off era in the new songs. Sure, the insane humour of those early LPs has been toned down, and the new sound is pristinely digital as opposed to organic and analogue, but otherwise it's pretty much Gong as we used to know it. How did they pull this off?

Torabi, whose former membership of the much-missed Cardiacs makes him no stranger to unhinged music, explains. "It's funny: the first thing is that we have to not think about that too much. We've all met fanboy characters who get very obsessive about every single Gong track and say, 'Why don't you do this?' If any of us were like that, we'd find it a little bit overwhelming and a lot of pressure. So because we're not like that, we've got the confidence to do things the way we feel they should be done.

"The other thing is that *Unending Ascending* is the second of a loose trilogy of albums, joined by three key themes. The universe is one of them, the moon is another, and water is the third. We didn't realise that the last album [*The Universe Also*

**“Every single person who likes Gong, whether that’s old Gong or new Gong, will have their own take on what the band should be. I’m the same about the bands that I like, so I get it.”**

*Collapses*, 2019] was going to be the first instalment of a trilogy, but as we were making the new one and its themes emerged, we thought, 'This feels like it's carrying on from the last album.' Because of that, we're now starting to make plans for what the third album will be like."

Dig into *Unending Ascending* and you're in for quite a journey. *All Clocks Reset*, the album's second single, nods directly to the jazzier elements of *Angel's Egg*, while its predecessor, *Tiny Galaxies*, resembles a sinister, music-hall relic. Put the big headphones on and sit back for *Ship Of Ishtar*, nearly nine minutes of widescreen choral ambience. It's the beating heart of this compelling album, and begs the question: how much does the new band look to the future, and how much does it look back to Gong's golden age?

"God, this sounds pretentious," Torabi chuckles, "but hey, this is prog rock, right? Gong was a vehicle for Daevid's mystical visions: this band has always been about that. Now it's a platform for me to talk about my visions of eternity, and my metaphysical ideas beyond the physical realm. Not that Gong is about me — with my own songs, and with my other band Knifeworld, there's a bit more navel-gazing and a bit more about my own life — but you can't do that in Gong: you've got to dissolve any egos."

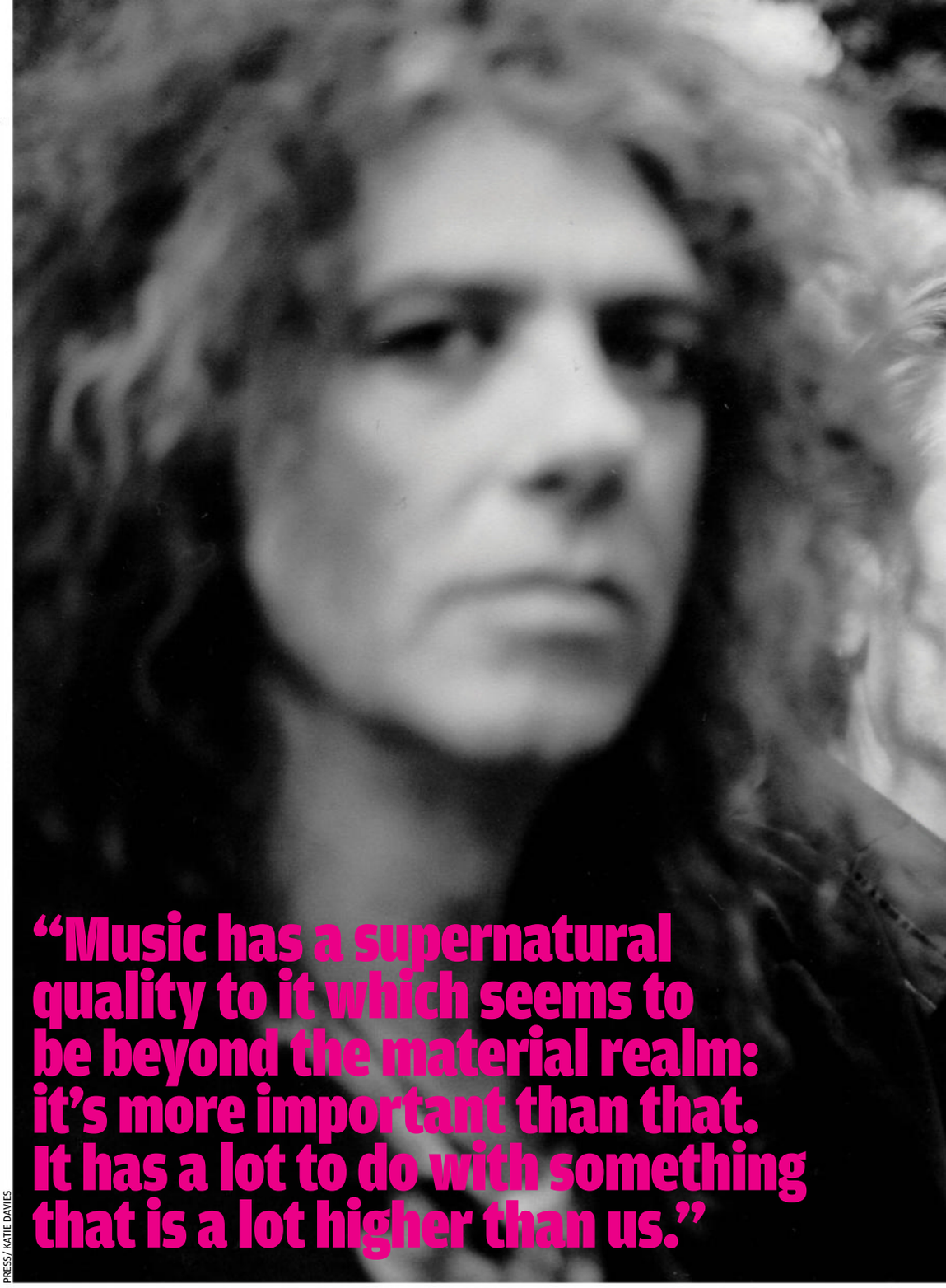
It's important to understand that the new Gong are a different beast to the old one, despite the sonic similarities we've just mentioned. It's important because that's what Daevid Allen wanted for the band he founded — for them to move forward, not stagnate into nostalgia. He and Torabi were, it turns out, not particularly similar as people, as the latter explains.

"I've never enjoyed confrontation, but Daevid liked to shake things up. He was always throwing a grenade into situations. He did that all the way through Gong because he didn't like things to stay the same. I don't want to say that he thrived on confrontation, exactly, but he liked fucking things up a bit. When he asked me to join the band, I thought, 'This guy is older than my dad, but he's so in the moment and so aware.'"

He then draws an unexpected, but welcome, comparison.

"Daevid was extremely inspiring: very funny and very astute, with a sharp mind. He wasn't ostentatious, but you'd know if he was in the room because he had an extraordinary energy about him. You know, he reminded me a lot of Tim Smith of Cardiacs."

If you're struggling to connect the lysergic fantasies of Gong with the sharp-edged art-rock of Cardiacs, who are sadly no longer active thanks to the premature demise of their leader, Smith, in 2020, don't worry: we're finding it tricky too. Torabi is convincing on this point, though, explaining, "Believe it or not, Tim was a huge fan of Daevid's. They both had the same sort of presence. The big difference between them was that Tim was quite benign, although he was very driven: he would never rock the apple cart."



**"Music has a supernatural quality to it which seems to be beyond the material realm: it's more important than that. It has a lot to do with something that is a lot higher than us."**

PRESS/ KATIE DAVIES

**Going up: new album *Unending Ascending*.**

How have Torabi and his band moved Gong away from their old sound? That's what Allen wanted, and so that was the challenge they faced — a tough one, given that they have an embedded fanbase to please.

"There's a couple of answers to that question," says the singer. "The first is that when I joined Gong, some decisions had to be made. I was already in my early 40s when I joined, and I'd already done Cardiacs, which was my favourite band of all time, so I didn't feel too overwhelmed — but it wasn't easy. One of Daevid's core ideas was the Radio Gnome Trilogy vision of *Zero The Hero And The Witch's Spell* and *The Pot Head Pixies* and that whole mythology. Now, that was his vision — but it's not mine, and it would feel bogus to take that story and make our version of it, because that was very much the vision that Daevid had.

"The other thing is that I'm pretty good with humour in real life, but I can't do humour in music very well. I know that humour was a big part of Gong before, and it's not that we've

Gong, 2023 version: still going strong with a whole new vision.

sacrificed that part of it, or that what we're doing is totally po-faced. I just don't have that kind of ability for wordplay that Daevid had: he was brilliant at that. Still, hopefully I'm able to write lyrics that are romantic and poetic and fantastical. Some people have said, 'The music's too serious now.' But I can't do funny music: again, it would be inauthentic if I did."

Talking of authenticity, how does Torabi prepare his mind for composing songs as left-field as these? Gong's music may sometimes be whimsical, and it's often beautiful, but it's always real, which means that it takes effort.

"I've had the kind of mystical experiences on psychedelics that religions get formed on," he explains. "I always used to be really self-conscious and I would never have talked about this stuff publicly before, so I'd always be quite vague when questioned about it, but Gong has enabled me to be much more upfront about my — and I use this phrase advisedly — spiritual beliefs."

And what is the doorway to this awareness — our old friend, acid?

"Sure, but I've always gone in with intent: I've never said, 'Let's bang down a few beers and do a tab.' It's always been about fasting for the day, cleansing the house and going in with intent. That's been a big thing for me. Also, I wouldn't go as far as to say that psychedelics are the only game in town, because as I understand it transcendental meditation will allow you to access the very nub of things too. The important thing is that I've always used psychedelics respectfully."

This brings us to the deeper mission, and indeed the deeper meaning, of Gong. This isn't just a band that make songs, or not as Torabi sees it, anyway. This is about a profound understanding of the human condition.

"Music has a supernatural quality to it which seems to be beyond the material realm: it's more important than that," he explains. "It has a lot to do with something that is a lot higher than us. For me, the first aim of the project of living is to make peace with mortality, because we're all going there. Ultimately that ties in with music, which has always been an obsession for me, going back as far back as I've been conscious. I tried to put everything together — psychedelics, music, dreams — and then I started reading mystical texts, which started describing exactly what I'd experienced."

He adds, "It turns out that there's no such thing as coincidences, because everything is synchronicity. It's about letting yourself be in a flow state and letting things that feel right come in. Even when it came to joining Gong, the band that I was listening to while tripping as a teenager, and thinking, 'These riffs are really great!' and then being asked to join… It all makes sense."

Maybe there *is* something at work on another plane here. How else do you explain the fact that Gong's audience is just as progressive as the band? You won't find many fans complaining about the new line-up's live performances — a rarity for a group with this much heritage behind them.

"There's a very forward-thinking mood in the band, and we've noticed it in the audiences too," confirms Torabi. "As the years have passed, our setlists have moved from, say, 50 per cent old songs, to 30 per cent old songs, and that genuinely hasn't been a deliberate move on our part. After a festival recently, one or two people said, 'That was a bit brave, not doing any old songs.' But we hadn't even considered it — and the set went down really well."

Torabi still loves the classics, though. "We always used to do *Master Builder*: it has the greatest riff ever and was the bridge between old and new Gong. And we often do *You Can't Kill Me* because it has a long improvised section in the middle — and also because the title very much sums up what Gong is all about. Clearly, we can't be killed."

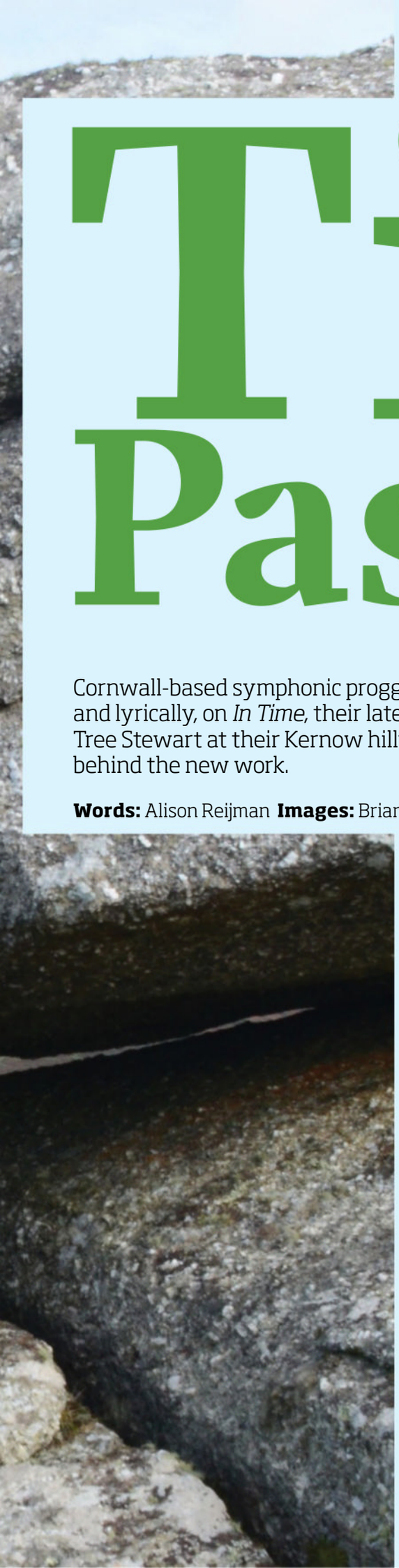
Wherever Daevid Allen is now, we bet he's smiling. Mission accomplished.

*Unending Ascending is out now via Kscope. Gong continue their co-headlining tour with Ozric Tentacles in March 2024. Head over to www.planetgong.co.uk for more information.*

## “Ours is not the sort of music to have on while you are cooking or having a conversation.”

**Ally Carter**

The Emerald Dawn take a break from the studio to reflect on *In Time*.



# Time Passages

Cornwall-based symphonic proggers **The Emerald Dawn** explore the idea of time, both sonically and lyrically, on *In Time*, their latest album. *Prog* catches up with band founders Ally Carter and Tree Stewart at their Kernow hilltop base to find out more about the complex ideas and themes behind the new work.

**Words:** Alison Reijman **Images:** Brian Peachey

"Ours is not the sort of music to have on while you are cooking or having a conversation," muses Ally Carter, summing up The Emerald Dawn's all-enveloping, otherworldly style of prog.

That's certainly true of the band's fifth studio album, *In Time*, which takes a metaphysical, mythological look at the concept of time via three tracks of differing length and sensibility. They're an eclectic quartet, as well. Multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Tree Stewart is also a professional circus performer, while guitarist, keyboard player and saxophonist Carter was a Professor of Philosophy. Bassist David Greenaway's extensive career has included playing in a comedy musical duo and he's now with a Blondie tribute band, while drummer Tom Jackson, who teaches drums, graduated from the University of Plymouth with a degree in Contemporary World Jazz.

*Prog* catches up via Zoom with Carter and Stewart in their Cornwall kitchen to talk about their creative process, which involves all four bandmembers.

"Tree and I are obsessed with the narrative; Tom and David are obsessed with the music, so we all meet at some point!" says Carter with a laugh.

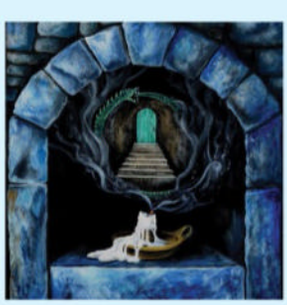
United in their belief and vision, they use their collective musical experiences and philosophical influences to expand the band's elaborate, ethereal sound. There are many spine-tingling moments throughout *In Time*, which, unlike previous albums, starts with the longest, most complex track: *Out Of Time* unfolds across five suites.

"The previous two albums ended with a very long track," says Carter. "So we thought it was a good idea not to mirror that again and reversed the order. In terms of the story, it makes more sense for it to come first. It starts with the idea of taking a moment in time and making it last forever. Then we say it's all in the head anyway, as sometimes it drags, sometimes it's fleeting – and finally, the last track says, 'No, we're all getting older, so time is trundling along as we all approach death.'"

But there's much more to it than that.

"The album explores how we experience time," says Stewart. "*Out Of Time* is about a moment that's so beautiful you want it to last forever, and then we develop the concept that if it *does* last forever, maybe it's not as good as you'd like it to be."

"It also looks at how disruptive it can be if you try to hang on it longer than it should," continues Carter. "We started running with the idea, imagining what time would think if you stole moments from it. After the song's opening, a sequence is repeated several times and it's rapidly changing time signatures – 7/8, 6/8, 5/8,



Stewart's artwork on the new album.

L-R: Tree Stewart, Tom Jackson, David Greenaway, Ally Carter.

**"*Out Of Time* is about a moment that's so beautiful you want it to last forever, and then we develop the concept that if it *does* last forever, maybe it's not as good as you'd like it to be."**
**Tree Stewart**

4/8. That's removing a beat from each bar, so it's stealing moments in time.

"Then we mythologised by adding the ouroboros: a big snake, which is a symbol of time that devours its own tail, in a Middle Eastern-sounding section. He's not happy that you've been stealing his moments, so gives you a good telling off!"

Second track *Timeless*, Stewart says, uses another complex technical musical process.

"That one is more about the elasticity of time and how people experience it. It can be a moment that lasts forever, but usually horrible moments seem to last longer and beautiful moments are fleeting. This is a mirror composition that comes in and goes out the way it came in."

Cue another mythological reference as *Timeless* features Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and duality, who looks forwards and backwards at the same time.

"Hence the mirror structure from the middle, which you can see forward or in reverse, depending which way you look," says Carter.

Closer *The March Of Time* has a completely different vibe.

"Tom put a lot of work into writing a basic progression, getting a marching feel to it at the beginning with a pattern building up and running through it," says Carter. "We keep that militaristic feel until we break into something completely different."

The band are conscious their labyrinthine compositions take listeners on varied sonic journeys. Says Carter: "There's a funny story about when our first fan listened to our first album, and we asked him what he thought of it. He said, 'I see spaceships.' Well, half of it is about a forest and as environmentalists, spaceships are not the number-one thing on our agenda. We asked him what he thought of the second album and he said, 'More spaceships, just darker!'"

There are no spaceships on the stunning album cover artwork, either. Instead, it shows an extinguished candle, its wisps of smoke framing a medieval door within a castle setting.

"I always do the painting during the recording process," Stewart's explains. "When I am not with these guys in the studio, I'm in the art studio or in the recording studio painting, so it is quite a full-on experience.

"My mum died in January, so the process of painting and doing an album about time was pretty epic and a mad journey for me. Whatever happens in my life seems to coincide with the album. I tried not to be too obvious in what I painted as whenever people create artwork about time, you're going to get a clock or an hourglass, or a sundial. I didn't want the front cover to be so obviously a clock."

Since the release of previous album *To Touch The Sky* in 2021, The Emerald Dawn's reach has grown and their live schedule has become busier. They recently took the opportunity to preview material from *In Time* at events including Fusion, Prog For Peart and this year's Sunday In September, which allowed them to reach an even bigger crowd.

"The festivals are really great because there is a big audience at them. It's a prog audience and they want to see prog," says Stewart.

They've played shows with *Prog* Limelight band EBB in Southampton and Exeter, too.

"They are incredibly professional, such a wonderful team and an absolute delight to share a stage with," says Carter.

One of the features of their live shows is Stewart's dazzling display of contact juggling, something she's been practising for 22 years.

"I learned it when I was doing performing arts stuff. It's not always appropriate for every gig, but people say it really goes with our music and the journeys we take people on. They like it, so we include it when we can. It is amazing to do it with the band, as we work so well together. I can do flourishes, which Tom picks up on the cymbals. It's really special."

Next year will see them resume their busy live programme through a rescheduled northern tour with EBB, Ghost Of The Machine and Long Earth. They're also the Saturday night headliners at the Soundle Festival in Peterborough in June. However, the overriding takeaway from speaking to the band is the great mutual respect between them.

"When we began, it was Tree, me and a drum machine," Carter enthuses. "When Tom joined, he added a load of stuff you could never programme a drum machine to do. When David joined the band, it was never on our radar that you could add those elements to our music, because there is so much variety and skill to his playing, which takes it to a completely different place. I never imagined we would sound as good as we do now."

*In Time is out now via Wild Thyme Records. See www.theemeralddawn.net for more information.*

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# Acoustic Solace

Lonely hotel rooms, deathbed reflections and the undeniable lure of strings have all fed into the making of the third solo album from The Pineapple Thief's driving force, **Bruce Soord**. He takes *Prog* inside the creative process that spawned *Luminescence*, taking care not to let his brain explode in the process.

**Words:** David West **Images:** Carl Glover

"Finding the right words was really difficult," says Bruce Soord.

The Pineapple Thief bandleader's third solo album, *Luminescence*, finds Soord in an introspective, reflective mood. It's an LP to slowly savour and absorb, qualities that may reflect its lengthy gestation as the music was written and recorded across a period from January 2021 to June 2023.

"It's one of those things where I would dip in," he says. "I'd work on it for a month or so and then be distracted with touring, Pineapple Thief, things like that."

And songwriting isn't a tap to be turned on and off at will.

"Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't," he adds. "It's one of those things you just can't force. I spent months chasing my tail. I was writing loads of songs but none of it seemed to be very coherent. Even though I had all these ideas, it didn't really come together until the beginning of this year. I gave myself a kick up the ass, went for a long walk, came back and realised what I had to do to finish the record."

During the lockdowns, Soord performed solo livestreams with just an acoustic guitar and a looper pedal, an experience that helped him clarify his sound and identity as a solo artist outside The Pineapple Thief. The acoustic guitar is central to the sound of *Luminescence*, providing the backdrop for Soord's musings and meditations on life, love and the tribulations of the modern world.

Even as the music was flowing, finding the right lyrics to express his thoughts remained a daunting part of the creative process.

"It just takes me ages; you can't sing any old crap, as much as I wish I could," he says. "It was formulating how I was going to get what I was feeling out lyrically; that's what took the time."

The album's first single, *Dear Life*, concerns "analysing the meaning of life, what the hell it is all about and trying to find some purpose, especially as I'm getting older," says Soord. But he doesn't want to turn all his attention inwards, even if it proves a wellspring of inspiration for creativity. "I'm in my studio now and I could spend all day consumed by this concept of thinking about the past, mistakes, finding peace, all that kind of stuff, and it would be exhausting," he says. "I'd be like, 'This is not how I want to live.' You can't think like this all day long, it's just ridiculous. By the end of the day, my brain is going to explode. I'd go back in the house and try to forget about it all. So it was a bit weird, but I can't help finding inspiration in that world."

It wasn't all gazing inwards: sometimes inspiration emerged from specific locations.

"There's a track called *Olomouc*, which is a town in the Czech Republic. I wrote that in the town on tour with The Pineapple Thief," says Soord. "We had a day off. I had my guitar in the hotel room, staring out the window, and wrote most of the song with the odd snippet of words here and there."

**Finding *Luminescence*: Soord ponders the meaning of life.**

**“You can’t sing any old crap, as much as I wish I could. It was formulating how I was going to get what I was feeling out lyrically, that’s what really took the time.”**

Like sitting alone, gazing out a window far from home, *Luminescence* is distinctly melancholic. One underlying thought informing the album was the notion of looking back over life from your deathbed. However, Soord doesn't want this to be a gloomy experience for the listener, hoping that there's a positive message in this idea of considering what's truly important, a thought that felt pertinent during the pandemic.

"I was reading how all of a sudden the spectre of death was suddenly much more vivid for a lot of people," says Soord. "How are you going to feel when you look back on your life? Are you going to have your priorities straight? If you think about that in your everyday life, it can really help you get a sense of perspective."

It's about resisting the impulse that's so much a part of contemporary society to rush through life, without ever pausing for breath.

"Before you know it, everything has passed you by, and then you think, 'Shit, what was really important?'" The answer is the people that we care about and who care about us.

"Really obvious stuff," says Soord, "but it's difficult to remind yourself that *that* is the important thing. The flipside of that is of course it's not that simple. We take part in the rush and the chaos of life because we all need homes and money."

Working away in his own studio space while ruminating on the purpose of existence can make for a solitary experience. However, Soord relies on his family for feedback which, in this instance, led him to add another layer to the arrangements.

"I'd actually finished the record and I was quite pleased with it," he says. "I was aware that it was really quite stripped back, and I burned it on CD and put it in the car, because that's where my wife first hears what I'm doing. I've got twin boys, they're 16. My kids were in the car and [one of them] said, 'Dad, your album... I think it would really, really sound better with some strings.' I was like, 'What are you talking about? It's finished!'"

But the idea of strings, once planted, only kept growing.

"I went to bed and I was tossing and turning: 'Shit, he's right, he's bloody right. One, it's finished, so mentally I'm gone; two, strings are expensive and when am I going to do it?' Then I thought, 'Sod it.' I thought, if you're going to do strings, you've got to do them properly."

So, it was off to RAK Studio 3 in north London to work with string arranger Andrew Skeet, of chamber pop act The Divine Comedy and a veteran of film and television scores.

"Ninety-five per cent of the advance from the label went on doing strings," says Soord. "I'm glad I did it – it really made a difference to the record. I'm very lucky that I was able to finance it. When I look back on my career, it's times like that when I realise, 'Oh God, yeah, I can go to RAK Studios,' and there were some of the best players you could find playing over my music. It always makes me emotional; I do get a bit emotional in the control room watching them play."

With Skeet's sumptuous strings, *Luminescence* cuts a very different musical profile to the sound of an amplified prog rock band with The Pineapple Thief. The album's acoustic arrangements provide an opportunity for Soord to put not just his lyrics but his singing firmly in the spotlight.

"One thing I've realised over the last five or six years is that my voice has become much more of a focus in my songwriting, whereas before I was a guitarist," he says. "There are a lot of people like this, they're a guitarist or songwriter and they sing out of necessity."

Part of this development has been learning to respect the voice as an instrument in its own right.

"That was my biggest failure – I didn't take it seriously enough," he continues. "The latter half of my career, my voice is a lot stronger. It's nice to be able to strip it right back so the voice is much more of the key to the song."

That focus on the voice and the lyrics brings with it a certain sense of vulnerability for an artist, as there's nowhere to hide in the music.

"It's always a real contradiction – why do people like me do it, put yourself out there like that?" he says. "When I'm writing and I'm singing here in my studio, it's not until I've finished a record that I think, 'Oh my God, this is going to be released and people are going to hear this. I might have to go out onstage in front of all these relative strangers, singing my heart out about all these personal, private things I've been thinking about!'

"It doesn't really make a lot of sense. I still can't explain it. Maybe it's cathartic. It's almost the same as when you have a deep conversation with a friend to let things out; it's the same thing, that's how I feel when I'm writing these words and singing them."

The deluxe edition of *Luminescence* includes an entire second disc of new material titled *Our Ship Sails At Dusk* – something that was actually an unintended side-product of the creative process.

"When I'd finished the main disc, which was coherent and told a story, I had all these other songs lying around," says Soord. "I thought rather than just let them waste away on my hard drive, I'd finish them and put them on the second disc. I thought it's almost like a double album in a way."

And the songwriter doesn't rule out the possibility of the songs on *Our Ship Sails At Dusk* finding their way into a future live set or cropping up somewhere else.

"My label Kscope, they have a tendency down the line to say, 'Ah Bruce, you know that bonus disc? Everyone is asking if it could be reissued on vinyl...' So they tend to have a way of creeping out of the woodwork in the future."

**"It's not until I've finished a record that I think, 'Oh my God, this is going to be released and people are going to hear this. I might have to go out onstage in front of all these relative strangers, singing my heart out about all these personal, private things I've been thinking about!'"**

When it comes to taking *Luminescence* out live, Soord confesses that he's "absolutely quite terrified. When I wake up at four o'clock in the morning, as we all do, and the world is caving in on your head, I think, 'Oh my God, I've got to go on tour! How am I going to do it? Will I be able to pull it off?'"

He did one show playing his solo material in January 2021 and had plans for more before everything shut down. But Soord finds encouragement in his fanbase.

"I've got really nice followers, the people who come to my shows and who I interact with on social media. They're really, really nice," he says. "I don't get any toxicity, so it makes my job easy. When I did the livestreams during lockdown, I wasn't particularly well prepared. I just said, 'Look, I'm going to do this, come and watch if you want.' Then I thought, 'Shit, what am I going to do? I can't remember how to play these songs!' It would all be a bit stop-start and I'd make loads of mistakes, but I think it's how you deal with that kind of thing. And I got the impression that everyone was kind of enjoying the fact that it wasn't super-slick. That's part of the fun."

*Luminescence is out now via Kscope. See www.brucesoord.com for more information.*

"I do get a bit emotional in the control room," Soord admits.

On the follow-up to 2020's more traditional *Folkesange*, **Myrkur**'s Amalie Bruun has created an experimental album of contrasts that takes the listener on a journey through motherhood and bereavement. Bruun tells *Prog* about the healing power of *Spine* and the life changes that inspired it.

**Words:** Cheri Faulkner
**Images:** Gobinder Jhitta

# TALK TO ME LIKE HUMANS DO

"A lot of big things happened in my life that sent me on this hurricane, whirlwind trip, but in order to grow and reach the next level you need to become a new you in a way."

The journey into motherhood can be a tumultuous one. Combine that with losing someone close and you might find a strong need to redefine yourself in a brand-new era of your life. Just ask Myrkur, real name Amalie Bruun, who is returning with her fourth studio album, *Spine*.

"I had a child [since the release of *Folkesange*] which is about as big a change as it can be," she says. "I had to find myself in that new life and that new role, and I went through a long period of not even wanting to play any music."

Bruun speaks of the adjustment to motherhood that saw her struggling to connect with her music — she didn't write anything new for over a year. "I went through a lot of changes and growth," she explains. "That led me to feel inspired to write *Spine* and that became a healing process for me."

*Prog* speaks with Bruun openly and frankly about the difficulties of becoming a mother, of intertwining your life before with your new life, and maintaining your self-identity — to which she nods knowingly. "Someone told me that if your life before becoming a mother had very little to do with the concept of being a mother or attending to somebody else, then it can be even harder," she explains. "I've just always been kind of a loner, you know?"

She elaborates further and explains that before having her child, she would only really worry about her music. "That's why it was an even bigger change, creating a life and then being entirely responsible, and all I can think about is this new baby. That was a really tough change for me to find my ground to stand on after that."

It's not just motherhood that Bruun has had to adapt to, though, as she sadly also lost her father between releasing albums. "A lot of big things happened in my life that sent me on this hurricane, whirlwind trip, but in order to grow and reach the next level you need to become a new you in a way. That's always painful, but worth it."

This huge shift in Bruun's personal life is reflected throughout *Spine*, which is far more personal than its predecessor. "It differs in every which way possible," she shares, a claim that would be outlandish to deny. Where *Folkesange* was an acoustic folk record, *Spine* blends folk, dark metallic traits and Bruun's personal touch to offer something intricate and unique. This shift is not only audible but thematic too, as *Folkesange* focused on tradition and was very much rooted in the past, whereas *Spine* looks to evolution: the future and stories yet to be told.

"I don't think I could have written *Spine* without doing *Folkesange*," Bruun explains. "It was written in a fever

"I don't think I could have written *Spine* without doing *Folkesange*."

Bruun sees herself as a moth seeking a flame.

dream I barely remember because of the state my head was in at the time."

There's a grit and a darkness on *Mothlike*, for example, that feels even more intimate and insightful after learning about the writing process.

"With that particular song, it was based on my personal experience at the time, which was a mix of complete insomnia and just this fever dream," she says. "It was a very physical experience of having no peace, just feeling so uneasy all the time, and trying to adapt to being a mother."

The personal journey Bruun embarked upon began to be reflected in physical manifestations, too.

"We had, all of a sudden, a lot of moths in our house, so quite literally I was living with moths in the night. I almost wished I was one of them: I felt this spirit, this compatibility."

This representation of Bruun's mental anguish has stuck with her ever since: "They're out all night looking for that light, flickering around, and I felt that, too."

Opening track *Bålfærd* takes its title from the word for a Viking funeral, and her personal life continues to manifest into *Spine*'s title track. "I put a close to the chapter of *Folkesange*," she says, "and went into my new chapter of my own mythology, if you will."

The album is deliberately left open for the listener's own interpretation. "I don't really have a desire to over-interpret or tell people what to feel, but what went through my head was a lot of feelings of isolation and trying to reconnect with the human world, the human race," she says.

Bruun explores the rise of artificial intelligence and "this kind of bionic, new, weird race" that we're becoming a part of. "I don't know what this is. We're moving away from what makes a human being human, and the human experience, at such a high speed that I don't think people realise the lizard brain hasn't been able to keep up."

She's referring to the rise of technology and the tech giants that she says have been "saluted as the heroes" for decades now. There's hope in her voice when she speaks of the way the human race is realising that this process has been on fast-forward, but believes there's still a narrative at play that states that "anything new and progressive is good" while maintaining that a lot has been lost during that development period.

"I think a lot of people are left feeling empty and isolated, with a loss of meaning and purpose. That's something I felt the need to write about, but in a hopeful way. I think this album is hopeful, and not muddy and blurry." This reflects back in her lyrics: *'Talk to me like humans do,'* Bruun says, felt like something she "really needed to say", and links it to the theme of the human experience.

Although the Danish singer-songwriter says *Spine* is her "most personal work yet", she hasn't always wanted to be associated with Myrkur as a project. In fact, in the beginning she tried to remain completely anonymous. "I didn't really have a long-term plan with Myrkur," she says. "I just wanted to send out one demo EP, but it came out right away." An eagle-eyed fan put two and two together after Bruun let slip about creating new music in an interview. "Then I didn't see the point in trying to keep hiding it," she says. "I grew into the project, taking more and more ownership of it."

After emphasising the intimacy and the personal experience she drew from to create *Spine*, Bruun concludes: "That's the first time, to this extreme degree, that I have been honest and needed to write something personal. It was a way of healing from everything I was going through at the time."

*Spine is out now via Relapse. See www.myrkurmusic.com for more.*

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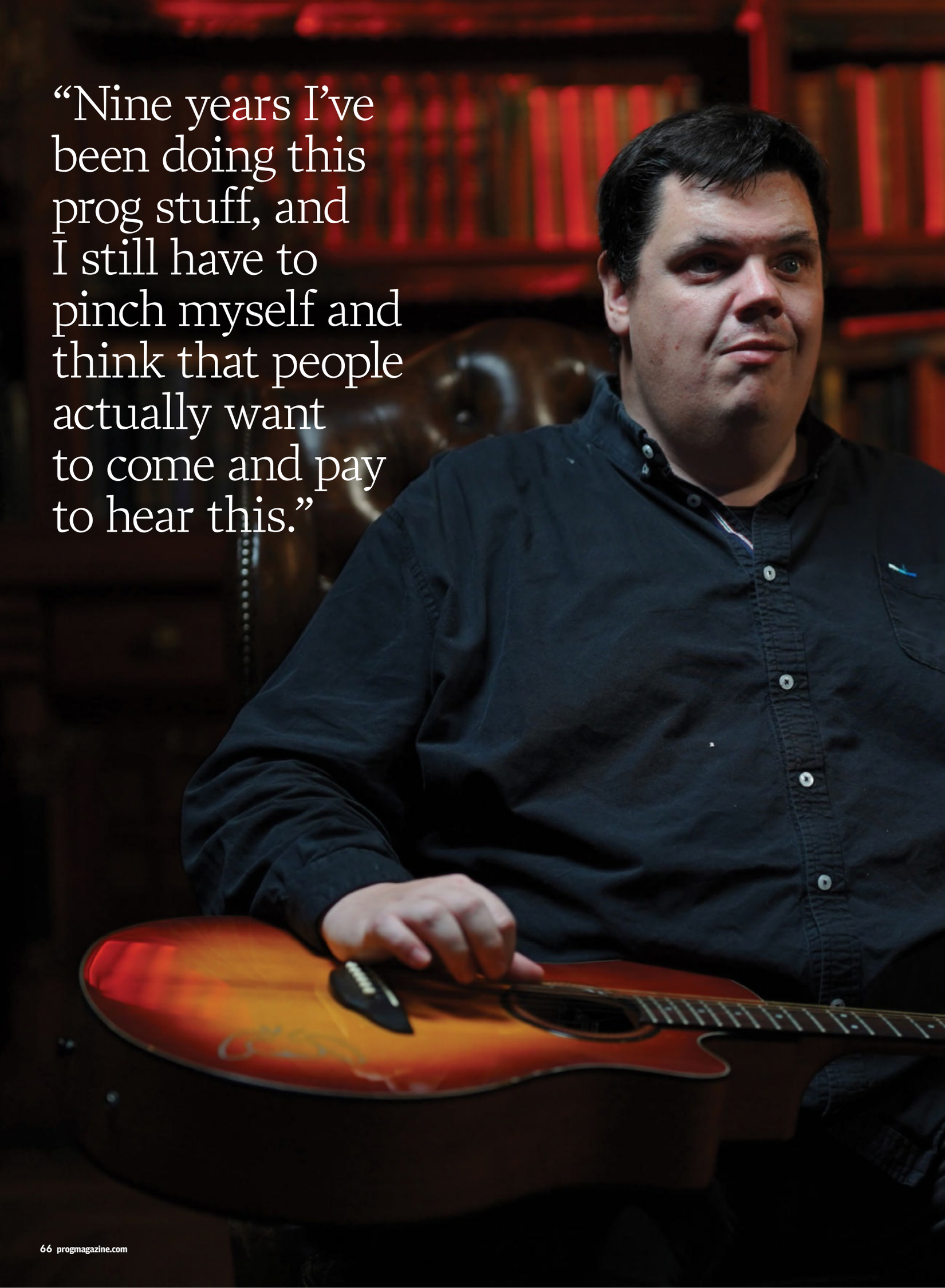

"Nine years I've been doing this prog stuff, and I still have to pinch myself and think that people actually want to come and pay to hear this."

# Winds Of Change

From the personal lyrics to the focus on the acoustic guitar, Peter Jones has gone back to basics with his latest **Tiger Moth Tales** album, *The Turning Of The World*. But as the multi-instrumentalist and vocalist tells *Prog*, it's an album that he needed to write.

**Words:** Chris Cope **Images:** Andrew Lawson

"I've been saying to everybody, and I probably should stop saying it because it's probably going to put some people off... but it's not the proggiest album that I've done," says Tiger Moth Tales mainman Peter Jones somewhat sheepishly about his new record, *The Turning Of The World*. "But it was just an album I felt I had to write."

Sometimes, needs must. With lyrics often focusing on the rudimental topic of coming to terms with the constant cogs of change, and songwriting that stemmed from the six strings of an acoustic guitar rather than any elaborate keyboard wizardry, it's fair to say Tiger Moth Tales' eighth album merits the stripped-back tag despite being labelled the "companion" to 2020's *The Whispering Of The World*.

While prog fans with a penchant for pandemonium may feel a little left out of the party, the brain-gnawingly catchy tunes and smooth melodies, mixed with just enough out-the-box thinking and divergence, sees Tiger Moth Tales at their most impactful yet.

Well, take the term 'their' lightly; Jones wrote, recorded and produced everything, sang and played every instrument — guitar, keys, drums, whistles, sax and more. The only outside input are Robert Reed and Christina Booth's backing vocals on the yearning *We'll Remember*, which is a tribute to the late Big Big Train vocalist, and Jones' previous collaborator, David Longdon.

"I have had a couple of guest players in the past, guest performers, and I've had guest writers on a couple of the albums," Jones says, down the line from his home in Nottinghamshire. "But this was all me. I wanted to go back to writing with a guitar, because back in the distant days before [2014 debut solo album] *Cocoon*, before I started doing prog, I used to do a lot of my writing on the guitar.

"This is back in my sort-of bachelor days, and I tried to make some kind of pop career. I would do a lot of the writing on the guitar, because it was just there on the wall. I would wake up at three o'clock, four o'clock in the morning. I'd get the guitar off the wall, and something would always come. I don't do that so much with the prog stuff.

"A lot of it is kind of complicated and I'm not that good a guitarist, so I tend to write mostly on keyboard, which is my main instrument for prog. But this time around, I really wanted to do an acoustic, guitar-based album. I think that dictated what the songs were going to be like. It was something that I wanted to do — to be able to just pick up the guitar round the campfire or in the pub or whatever — I wanted to play these songs properly on the guitar. So that's why it's more stripped back."

At the spine of the album, which was recorded on an old eight-track cassette set-up, is a juxtaposition of joy, and reflection. Take *So Wonderful To Be Alive*, for example: a peppy tune that gives Jones the platform to reflect on a "bunch of good memories, right from when I was a kid, right up to my wedding day", or the title track, the earworm *The Turning Of The World*, which tackles the universal topic of change.

But then there's *You Reached For My Hand*, or the aforementioned Longdon tribute. It's personal stuff, but it touches on topics that tend to have the most impact.

"My dad was very seriously ill at the end of last year, and then quite a long way into this year he was in hospital in an induced

Jones played all the instruments on his new record (not at the same time, obviously).

New album *The Turning Of The World.*

> "With this album, it's definitely a lot more personal. People seem to react more to the albums that are personal to whoever made them."

coma," Jones says about *You Reached For My Hand*. "There were a lot of times when we didn't know if he was going to make it, and obviously that was a terrible time for us to go through, and for him.

"As a family we don't go overboard with the emotional outpouring, and so it wasn't until a bit later when I was thinking back to all that, and it came very quickly and naturally – as some songs do. Some songs I can be fretting over for weeks, and months and years, even. That one came out very quickly and easily. It's a short song, but it says what it needs to, and how we're all so glad that he came through it."

Real life stories, with real emotions. Jones says you can "really have fun" with progging out on fantasy lyrics or telling other people's stories and conjuring up different worlds.

"But with this album it's definitely a lot more personal," he reflects. "It's funny because people seem to react more to the albums that are personal to whoever made them, because somehow it seems to connect with stuff that they've experienced as well."

Jones' journey to prog is fairly well known; from rubbing shoulders nearly 20 years ago with Simon Cowell on the talent show *The X Factor* as part of pop vocal duo 2 To Go, to channelling a love of acts like Genesis into creating neo-prog epics with Tiger Moth Tales. Nowadays, he also provides keyboards for Camel and Francis Dunnery's It Bites – and is part of Red Bazar and Cyan. To keep the bills paid, he still plays club and pub gigs, performing covers from the 60s to the modern day, and has done for more than two decades.

Jones isn't too keen to dwell on his stint on *The X Factor*, where the cut-throat nature of TV stung.

"It seems like a lifetime ago," he says. "It's all part of life's experience. The TV thing is kind of overrated, but we did the live arena tour after that, which was a lot of fun. I think we did 10 arenas, so that was a nice touring experience. It's a different audience now and not quite the arenas anymore, but doing the stuff I do now is more fulfilling.

"Nine years I've been doing this prog stuff, and I still have to pinch myself and think that people actually want to come and pay to hear this. And then of course doing stuff like the Camel tours that I've done, that's on a whole different level."

The cogs, meanwhile, are already turning for more Tiger Moth Tales material. Like a burst dam, there is no stopping Jones when he's in full flow. Having already released records about winter and spring, there's still two seasons in his "back pocket", he hints with a smile. But the musician says he may also look to revive an album he started back in 2005 that never got finished. Add those to the other jobs, and there's plenty going on in the life of Peter Jones. But you get the feeling he wouldn't have it any other way.

"Sometimes I think my head is spinning and I don't know what the hell I'm doing, and I'm trying to juggle too many things," he concedes. "I don't make that easy on myself – I agree to all these things, so I've got no one else to blame. There have been times when it does get a bit much. But at the end of the day, I'm making and contributing to music that I love, and working with some amazing people, and ultimately I'm a very lucky lad. I never thought I'd be doing all this stuff.

"I never thought that prog would be some sort of positive career move, back in 2014. It's been amazing what's happened since."

*The Turning Of The World is out now via White Knight Records. See www.tigermothtales.com for more information.*

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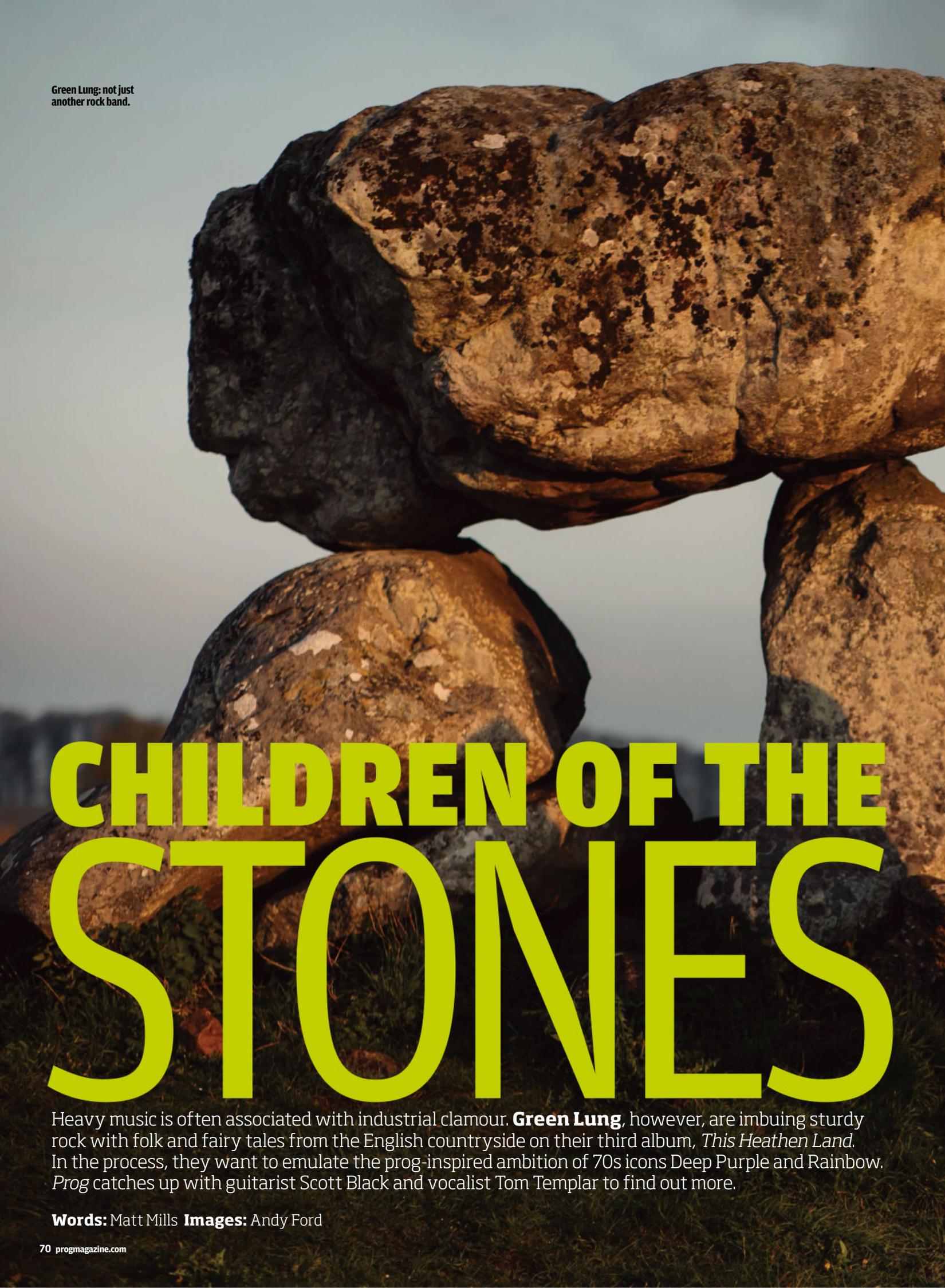

Green Lung: not just another rock band.

# CHILDREN OF THE STONES

Heavy music is often associated with industrial clamour. **Green Lung**, however, are imbuing sturdy rock with folk and fairy tales from the English countryside on their third album, *This Heathen Land*. In the process, they want to emulate the prog-inspired ambition of 70s icons Deep Purple and Rainbow. *Prog* catches up with guitarist Scott Black and vocalist Tom Templar to find out more.

**Words:** Matt Mills **Images:** Andy Ford

Scott Black spent his childhood immersed in the myths of the English countryside. The Green Lung guitarist grew up in rural Devon and used to pass the time playing with his friends in a disused quarry. Back at home, he'd get told that the quarry was stalked by a woodwose: a hair-coated wild man straight from Arthurian fables. And this wasn't just a bedtime story that grown-ups invented for children's ears, either.

"Even the old blokes at the pub that your dad would hang out with used to talk about it," the musician remembers on a video call with *Prog*, on which he's joined by lead singer Tom Templar. "Growing up very close to Dartmoor, before the internet, all of those legends seemed very plausible."

Since Green Lung formed in 2017, they've presented a distinctly folklore-inspired take on classic rock. Their full-length debut, *Woodland Rites*, juxtaposed the riffing of Black Sabbath, who formed amid the smog of industrial Birmingham, against lyrics about forest rituals and witches' covens. Their 2021 follow-up, *Black Harvest*, was self-categorised as the soundtrack to the folk-horror film inside the band's heads, and now *This Heathen Land* pushes the five-piece both deeper into the countryside and farther from comparison to any singular band before them.

Green Lung's third album is a convergence of swaggering hard rock, theatrical organs and quiet, occult folk music. It's what would happen if *Rising*-era Rainbow lured Atomic Rooster to a pagan ceremony in the heart of an English forest. Second single *Maxine (Witch Queen)* pays tribute to Cheshire-born priestess Maxine Sanders, and is driven by danceable drum beats and twirling, prog-like keyboards. *The Ancient Ways* is a cavalcade of proto-metal riffs dedicated to Crockern Tor and Wistman's Wood ("haunted" landmarks in Black's native Devon), while *Song Of The Stones* uses folky acoustic guitars and retells the 1892 Grant Allen ghost story *Pallinghurst Barrow*. In simply pulling the genre from the cityscape, Green Lung are making 70s-indebted heaviness fresher than it's sounded in a generation.

"Black Sabbath and Judas Priest are [just two of the] bands we like, and they sit in that city, industrial context," Templar explains. "But it's not like we're a bunch of 'metal or die' guys. We listen to a really broad range of stuff. In prog and in folk, there's tons of it: a million prog rock bands have sleeves where they're in a wood or by a river."

Black adds, "We very specifically wanted to make *This Heathen Land* a love letter to albums produced by

"I want us to be a band who create a world that, sonically and lyrically, stands on its own."
**Tom Templar**

Green Lung, L-R: Matt Wiseman, John Wright, Tom Templar, Joseph Ghast, Scott Black.

Martin Birch [in the mid-1970s], like Deep Purple's *Stormbringer* and all the Rainbow albums. It was a time when metal hadn't calcified into what it became. It was pre-New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, with weird synths and a lot of prog influence everywhere. There were a lot of eccentric musical choices that we wanted to evoke on this record."

While countless rock fans are nostalgic for the era of music that Green Lung are emulating, Black and Templar aren't among them. The duo are only 33 and 34, respectively, meaning that the halcyon days of Sabbath, Rainbow and 70s prog happened a decade and a half before they were born. But, again, it was their upbringing in the country that gave the pair an appreciation for the classics.

"I grew up in rural Norfolk with fuck-all to do," Templar laughs. "My friends were listening to Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and all the old-school shit, because it's still there in those kinds of places. If you walk into a pub in rural Norfolk, you'll probably see an AC/DC tribute band onstage — it's still there!

"My dad used to play me Neil Young and Leonard Cohen, which I totally fell in love with," the singer continues, "and I remember buying a compilation from Woolworths that had Metallica on it. I only just got into [2000s metal band] Lamb Of God, so I've always been 20 years behind!"

> "There were a lot of eccentric musical choices that we wanted to evoke on this record."
>
> **Scott Black**

***This Heathen Land*, Green Lung's latest.**

Meanwhile, 300 miles away in the West Country, Black initially had more contemporary tastes. He got into the nascent angst of nu metal and 90s/00s metal as a pre-teen, including bands such as Limp Bizkit, Linkin Park and Machine Head.

"I asked my nan for a Machine Head CD in 2002 — and she got me *Machine Head* by Deep Purple," the guitarist says with a laugh. "At first, I hated it, but I gradually fell in love. It did a hard reset on my metal journey."

"When you really get into metal, you tend to pick yourself a sub-sub-sub-subgenre," adds Templar. "I was a doom guy. Sabbath loomed so large, and that era was still influencing [newer] bands like Cathedral and Electric Wizard. It's a weirdly backwards-looking genre."

The pair began playing with bands in their respective hometowns, but the constraints of rural life soon began to show, for both their careers and musical futures.

"In the small town I grew up in, the employment opportunities were the local bakery or being a tradesman," Black remembers.

The guitarist upped sticks to London to study, and eventually corralled the instrumental players of what would become the first Green Lung line-up. Unable to find a singer, the four-piece considered ploughing on without vocals altogether — but, laughs Black, "We were nowhere near good enough to do that kind of thing."

Templar also moved to the capital. When he did, he brought with him ideas that he'd first come up with back in Norfolk: they tapped into the occult, folkloric aura that would later become a signature of Green Lung.

"When I was moving from my parents' house, I found a bunch of old lyrics that weren't that far from Green Lung, even then," he recalls. "It sat with me. A lot of that British folklore stuff, it's done in a twee, silly way. I'm not saying that Green Lung isn't sometimes silly, but [I needed to] land it in this place where it felt mysterious, exciting and interesting; not the Morris-dancey, '*hey-nonny-no*' end of folklore."

The singer and the rest of the band were able to link up over the internet. From there, they evolved from traditional stoner doom to the ambitious, genre-splicing rock they play on *This Heathen Land* organically, as Green Lung grew their audience and began to take their music seriously.

"We started the band with the idea of just playing small pub venues," says Black. "When we made *Woodland Rites*, we'd never played to more than 10 people, so we made it thinking, 'Let's just do a catchier Sabbath album.' When people start paying attention, you start to think about what it is you're doing."

And momentum snowballed quickly. Between *Woodland Rites* and *Black Harvest*, Green Lung signed to indie label Svart (home to such prog alumni as Ianai and Onségen Ensemble), then with the announcement of album number two were profiled in *The Guardian* and reached the top of the Bandcamp pre-order charts. In the run-up to *This Heathen Land*, they leapt to Nuclear Blast Records, meaning the band now share a roster with Nightwish, Enslaved and Cellar Darling.

As for what they'll evolve into, Green Lung have no clue.

"There's a British folk singer-songwriter called Richard Dawson who said something that really resonated with me," says Black. "And that's that, after you release a record, you need to just let it be. You need a bit of a honeymoon period. So, honestly, I have no idea what's next."

No matter what they make going forward, though, Templar wants Green Lung to be remembered as having built their own unique thematic and musical universe.

"I want us to be a band who create a world that, sonically and lyrically, stands on its own," he says. "Sometimes people text me photos of a load of reindeer that inexplicably died in a circle and say, 'This is so Green Lung!' I'm just like, 'Yeah! This is working!'"

*This Heathen Land is out now via Nuclear Blast. See www.greenlung.co.uk for more information.*

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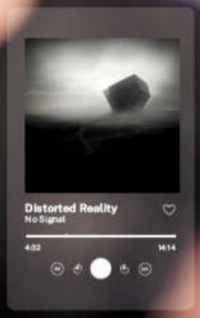


# DARK BLUE

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**Steve Hackett**

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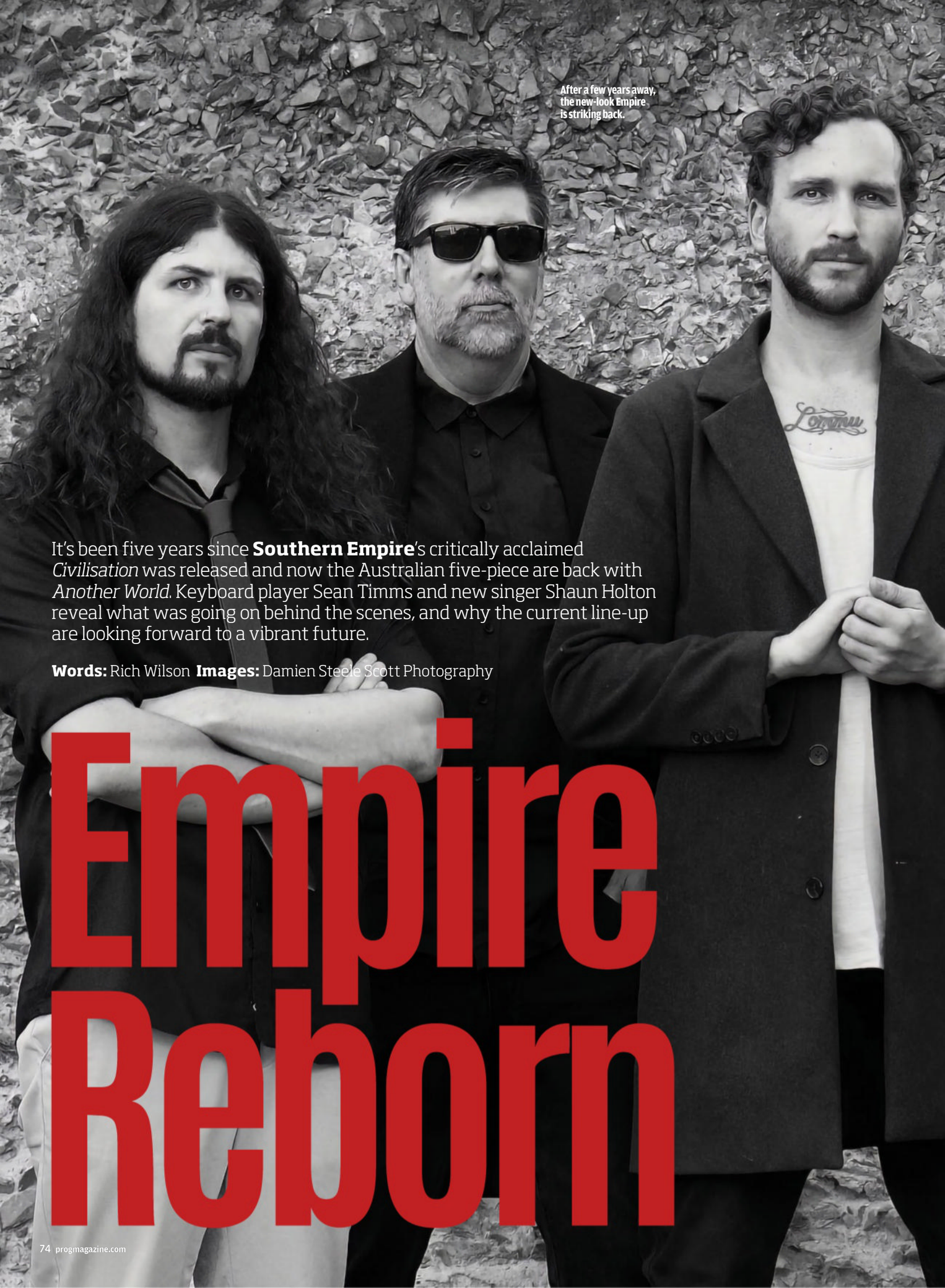
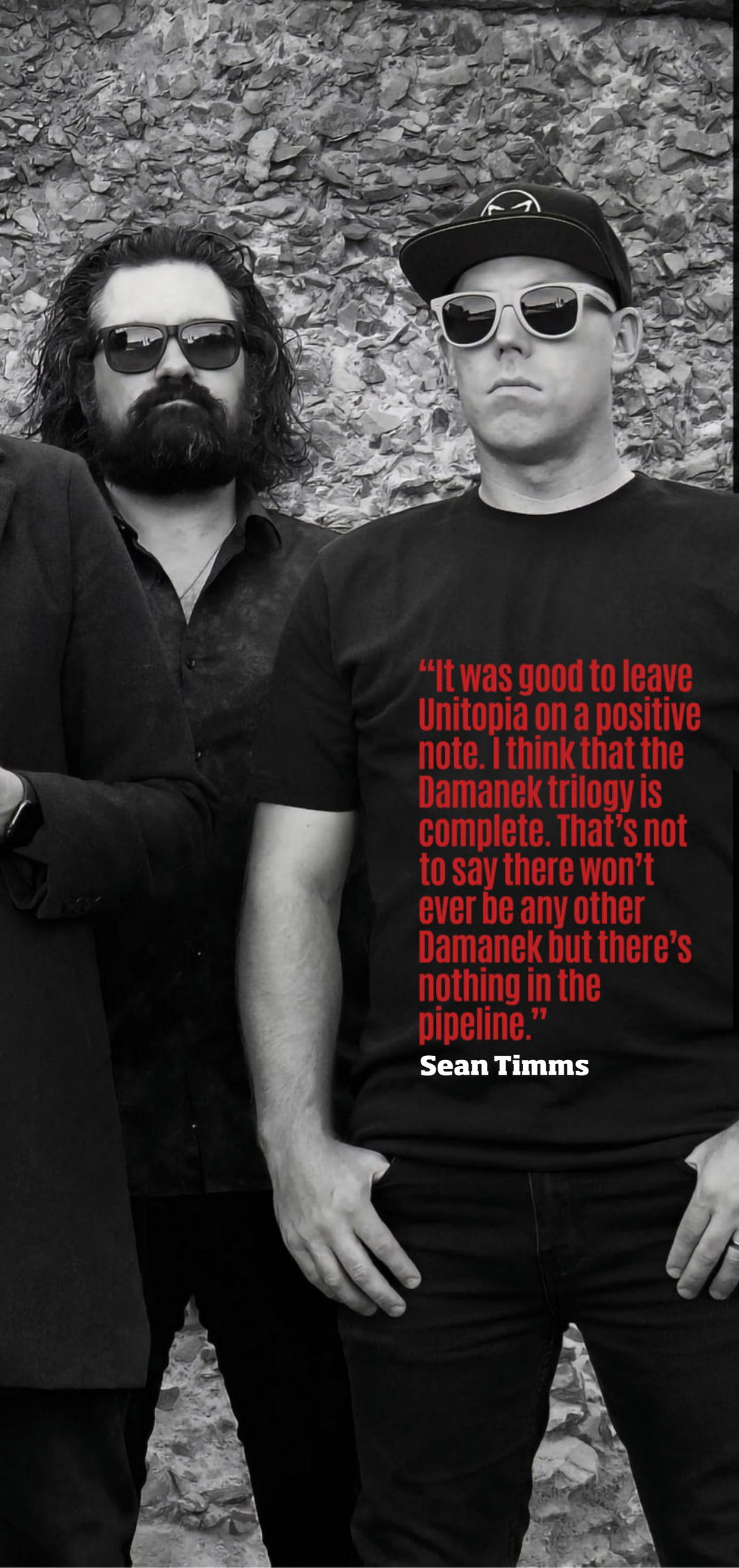


After a few years away, the new-look Empire is striking back.

It's been five years since **Southern Empire**'s critically acclaimed *Civilisation* was released and now the Australian five-piece are back with *Another World*. Keyboard player Sean Timms and new singer Shaun Holton reveal what was going on behind the scenes, and why the current line-up are looking forward to a vibrant future.

**Words:** Rich Wilson **Images:** Damien Steele Scott Photography

# Empire Reborn



> "It was good to leave Unitopia on a positive note. I think that the Damanek trilogy is complete. That's not to say there won't ever be any other Damanek but there's nothing in the pipeline."
>
> **Sean Timms**

Five years ago, Adelaide-based Southern Empire created unbridled momentum with the release of their well-received *Civilisation* album. The band completed a tour of the UK and Europe that garnered themselves more attention, before a radio silence fell over recent years. That leads to the understandable question of what exactly happened?

"Well, it certainly wasn't our intention," recalls keyboard player and project leader Sean Timms. "Things were going really well for the band and we wanted to capitalise on that. We got back to Australia and then Covid hit, which took everybody out for a while. I have a recording studio and because musicians couldn't play live, the studio got really busy. Anyway, we finally got the album completed. It was all recorded, everything was ready to go. All I needed to do were a few finishing touches on the mixes and master the album."

At that point, the plans were somewhat placed on hold when it became apparent that not all the band were as enthused with the project as Timms. Specifically frontman Danny Lopresto, who was noticeably incommunicado from group discussions.

"I wasn't getting much of a response from Danny, so I chased him up and asked what was going on," he remembers. "He said that he wanted to see me in person to talk it through. Basically, he had decided to move on for a variety of reasons and even though it was amicable, his reasoning was a little bit nebulous. I think that because it had been so long between doing the tour and finishing the album, he had lost a little bit of interest. He also had some other avenues that he was wanting to pursue with his covers band."

With the album already fully recorded, the departure of Lopresto caused an understandable, initial panic. A new singer needed to be recruited speedily to re-record Lopresto's vocals. Guitarist Cam Blokland suggested that local frontman Shaun Holton could be the perfect addition. Holton had a strong progressive background, having already released a well-regarded album under the moniker of Projected Twin in 2008. Stints in various Adelaide cover bands followed before the pandemic clinically removed that source of income. With a young family to support, Holton had taken a financially enforced step back from the music scene.

"I got this job at a call centre," he recalls with a sigh. "You would get up in the dark, drive an hour and a half to a dark call centre with no windows and then drive home in

Southern Empire, L-R: Brody Green, Sean Timms, Shaun Holton, Cam Blokland, Jez Martin.

the dark. I basically spent nine months living in the dark. I had completely signed myself off of music when I got a call from an unknown number. I wasn't answering the phone at the time because I was avoiding debt collectors. Fortunately, Sean left me a message, I called him back and he gave me the rundown about Danny leaving the band.

"I had been a big prog fan for decades, but I really only knew of Southern Empire through my mate Cam. Although we never worked together, Cam has been a supporter of me for a long time and he kept putting my name forward for things. I was really hesitant. I didn't know Southern Empire and I also didn't really know who I was talking to, either. I knew Sean was a local producer but I didn't fully realise that I was talking to the musical genius that I'm working with now. I happened to be home from work one day and I put the album on. I was listening to it, but I was in a bad mood. My wife was listening and she said, 'Are you going to do it?' I told her that a year ago I would have, but that I didn't really think I could get into this right now. She pretty much shook me and said, 'You are doing this!'"

Domestically persuaded, Holton arranged to visit Timms' studio and added his vocals to one of the tracks.

"Sean gave me the opportunity to pick a song," he says. "We bashed it out pretty quickly and then maybe a week or so later, he sent me back the mix. I got about halfway through the song and I just started crying. When I started doing prog around 15 years ago, I loved Porcupine Tree and Opeth, and my dad had lots of Pink Floyd LPs. To hear myself in the mix of this epic piece of music was a bit of a dream realisation. That was the moment for me, when I realised that this was just what I wanted to do."

Holton's admission of emotion is entirely understandable. With *Another World* Southern Empire have again created an album that is replete with their usual lush keyboards and shrewd changes of tempo, which have infiltrated their recordings to date. Aside from a new singer, there are some other noticeable changes, with the production sounding particularly crisp and material benefiting from the input of bandmembers other than Timms.

> **"I had completely signed myself off of music when I got a call from an unknown number. I wasn't answering the phone at the time because I was avoiding debt collectors. Fortunately, Sean left me a message."**
>
> **Shaun Holton**

"With the first album [*Southern Empire*] and *Civilisation*, there were tracks on there that were initially written for an abandoned Unitopia project," he explains. "So, it was a mishmash of my style, writing for a different kind of band. With this album, I was specifically writing for this band. Essentially Southern Empire is a little heavier, so I pushed that a little further. For the first two albums, it was predominantly my writing but this time, I asked Cam if he had anything else. We just sat in my studio and he played me *Hold On To Me* and I just thought that was such a sensational piece of music. He also tracked a song called *Butterfly*, which I felt I could make into something and that became the last track on the album. Brody [Green, drummer] came up with rhythmic ideas and he was very creative. Before he left, Danny had started to come up with some lyrical ideas and guitar sections, which is why he is credited with a co-write. So there probably is a little bit of a change in style, plus we have a brilliant, incredible, new lead singer."

Aside from Unitopia, Timms is also known for his work with Guy Manning in Damanek, with both releasing albums this year. However, with both those projects now appearing to come to an end, he states an intention to solely focus on propelling Southern Empire to write and record new albums. "My first passion and main priority has always been Southern Empire since it started," he explains. "It satisfies all of the musical ambitions and aspirations that I have as a keyboard player, writer and producer. It's definitely not going to be another five years between albums. This is also the last Unitopia album that I will do and it was good to leave Unitopia on a positive note. I think that the Damanek trilogy is complete. That's not to say there won't ever be any other Damanek, but there's nothing in the pipeline. That means I can concentrate wholly and solely on original music for the next Southern Empire record."

For Holton, that excitement has also been tinged with a sense of nervousness as to how fans of Southern Empire would react to his involvement. Fortunately, the online reception to promo videos from the new album have been exceptionally positive.

"I was quietly shitting my pants," he laughs. "People love Danny both inside and outside of the prog community, so musically I've had a massive set of shoes to fill. Having been a rabid young fan of prog, I totally understand what it's like when it's not right. I was proud of my contribution and I love the album, but I had no idea if people were going to be happy. The reception has been awesome, which it didn't have to be, so I'm very, very happy."

*Another World is out now via GEP. See www.facebook.com/southernempireband for more information.*

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# THE PROG INTERVIEW

# EDGAR BROUGHTON

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Edgar Broughton**. Leader of his titular band, Broughton's musical career began in earnest in the late 1960s when The Edgar Broughton Blues Band swapped blues for the emerging psychedelic sounds of the age, setting them on a more progressive path than first intended. Although the band's initial phase came to an end in the early 80s, the multi-instrumentalist and vocalist has released a handful of solo albums, including his latest, *Break The Dark*, which sees him reuniting with members of the EBB's alumni. Here, he discusses his former band's heyday, making a "Sunday afternoon" album, and reveals why he thinks politics has a place in music.

**Words:** Rob Hughes

Founded in Warwick in 1968, the Edgar Broughton Band came to embody a distinct facet of the British counterculture. Their intense songs often dealt in socio-political issues, earning them a reputation as a confrontational bunch with a happy habit of extending the middle finger to authority.

Led by singer/guitarist Rob 'Edgar' Broughton, with brother Steve on drums and bassist Arthur Grant, their music was just as uncompromising. Psychedelia, heavy rock, beardy prog and experimental folk were locked in an uneasy embrace, usually crowned by the kind of low vocal rasp that saw Broughton routinely compared to Captain Beefheart.

New album Break The Dark.

Signed to Harvest, the progressive arm of EMI, they quickly became known as a 'people's band', playing free festivals and a steady stream of benefit gigs for any number of worthy causes. Arrests, fines and court appearances were not uncommon during the Edgar Broughton Band's 70s heyday, though nothing appeared to dissuade them from their objectives. Their fanbase only became more committed, while the anthemic *Out Demons Out* (inspired by The Fugs' mock exorcism of the Pentagon) sought to unite the disaffected in a way that was both cathartic and convivial.

They issued a string of ambitious studio albums along the way, from 1969's deeply weird *Wasa Wasa* to the strings-enhanced sophistication of 1971's *Edgar Broughton Band* and on through the more expansive terrain of *Oora* (1973) and *Bandages* (1976). The band finally bowed out in 1982 with *Superchip*, a mostly synth-led concept piece about sinister governmental control.

Broughton spent much of his subsequent time as a youth and community worker in south London, reviving the EBB only occasionally for live gigs. They reformed in earnest in 2006, with Broughton's son Luke as an extra player, prompting a steady run of shows that lasted another four years.

> "Little did [EMI] know that we were paving the way for them having to deal with the Sex Pistols in the future."

Broughton Snr has been active as a solo artist ever since, though his recorded output has been disappointingly thin. He's now started putting that to rights with the remarkable *Break The Dark*. Largely recorded at home during the Covid lockdown, it's an unexpected treat, reliant on electronica, minimal guitar textures and strings. He's been judicious with hired help, bringing in EBB's Arthur Grant, cellist Calle Arngrip and distinguished producer John Leckie (who began his career as a tape op on *Wasa Wasa*) to handle the mixing.

"Getting John involved was really special," Broughton tells *Prog*. "I can honestly put my hand on my heart and say this album really was a labour of love. And I think some of it's beautiful. There's some dark stuff in there, but there's real hope as well,

The Edgar Broughton Band circa 1970.

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

PRESS/AL STUART

Edgar Broughton: calming down in his later years... but not by much.

I think. For the last couple of years, until very recently, I've sort of worked at it as a day job. I'd get out of bed, cross the room, turn the laptop on and start. Sometimes I'd just be there in my pants!"

Thankfully, Broughton is fully clothed for today's Zoom call with *Prog*. Over the next hour, he revisits his early years as a "bolshy" outsider and charts the band's controversial career, plus the deeply personal journey that's brought him to the new album.

**How did *Break The Dark* take shape?**

I wanted to do something different. There's traces of the Edgar Broughton Band in there, but this was really a kind of reinvention.

**How did recording at home affect your approach to these songs?**

Having no studio costs brought a certain freedom. It allowed me to scrap and revisit songs. *Sound Don't Come*, for example, is about Mick Farren. I did a gig at London's Borderline [July 2013], where Mick was also playing with his band, survivors of The Deviants, that whole crew. I knew him from way back. He'd reviewed a box set of the Broughtons and said it was "inane hippie nonsense". I thought that was a bit naughty, so I was determined to go up to him at this gig, with my little bottle of brandy, and say, "Mick, you look terrible. Oh man, what's happened to you? Would you like a drink?" It was mostly thought of in fun. But

word loosely, it's important to know where you stand and what you believe in. I grew up in a socialist household and I've always valued what I've got and cared about people who haven't got anything. I like to think that I've championed the underdog wherever possible.

**Was that something you wanted to explore when you started the Edgar Broughton Band?**

It was partly about me feeling that I was a square peg in a round hole and I wanted to explore why. I was a bit sort of bolshy at school and everywhere, really. I was quick to express my opinions and challenge people. When we started the band, and after we'd moved on from

Brothers Edgar Broughton (left) and Steve Broughton in 1971.

EVENING STANDARD/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

I've always loved electronic music and programming and messing around with stuff – it felt like time to combine it all. I also wanted to send out several messages that might take some consideration. Sort of positive, but also realistic. There's such a mixture of subjects, from ballads to quite political stuff to very personal things. There's a song about Steve, for example. [Steve Broughton passed away in May 2022.]

**Is that *Half Light*?**

Yeah. The middle part of *Half Light* has a kind of guitar solo and a drum, almost like a ghost drummer that suddenly starts playing a second kit. Quite heavy. I tried to make it sound like how Steve would've played it.

when I saw him, he had an oxygen bottle with him. He could hardly talk. He went out onstage, they started some music, I heard a bit of a verse, then they stopped. Mick had collapsed. He died onstage. So I wrote this song, but it wasn't working. In the end I made this really sketchy thing with a quiet vocal as a guide. I still wasn't sure it was good enough to be on the album, but John Leckie said, "This is great, this could be a single!"

**You mentioned *Break The Dark*'s political edge. Were you always politically engaged?**

I think so. For an artist, and I use the

1969's weird *Wasa Wasa* album.

loving The Shadows and blues and stuff like that, it crept into my writing. I started to improvise things like [14-minute opus] *Dawn Crept Away*, from *Wasa Wasa*. Not so many years ago, somebody asked our guitarist, Andrew [Taylor], what it was all about. He said, "It's some kid screaming his head off in pain." That's the kid I was. I was really mixed up and out of kilter with most everybody else, including other musicians, who would've said I was a punk if the term had been invented. From when I was a kid onwards, I suffered from depression and little panic attacks.

Edgar Broughton on July 8, 1973.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

**And did being in a band help express those issues?**
Yeah, it did. It gave me a place to be, amongst my peers. Finally, I had found a sort of niche in life. By the time we played Hyde Park to all those thousands of people [June 1969, headlined by Blind Faith], I was at home, that was my living room. I was absolutely comfortable there and I loved it.

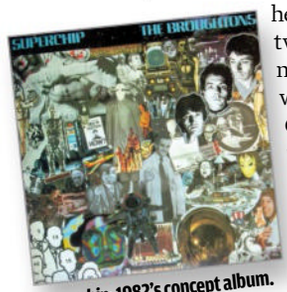
**Musically, what prompted that switch from blues to something heavier, weirder and more psychedelic?**
I loved the sound of the blues – Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters – and I could emulate it in the same way that Eric Burdon could. But then there was that kind of revolution that started on the west coast of America, where people started to write stuff that was pertinent to their lives. I think that's when the switch happened. It seemed almost necessary, or incumbent upon me, to start writing poetry about how I saw things, as opposed to just keep singing the blues. I've always had a thing about being a museum. In the early days, me and the guitarist used to go to the Rose & Crown in Warwick. There was a chap there with elbow patches and a regimental tie. I looked at him and said, "Y'know what, I will never, ever be like that."

> The BBC did a thing called *Heavy Metal Britannia* [2010] and they also did a prog one. And I was in both of them. I thought that was rather nice.

**You were often associated with other so-called 'community bands' like The Deviants, Pink Fairies and Hawkwind, but there was always something very *other* about the Edgar Broughton Band.**
Compared to most of them, we had melodies, along with things like *Love In The Rain*, *Out Demons Out* and stuff that was sort of pseudo metal. We had *Evening Over Rooftops* and *Hotel Room*, which Tony Blackburn played five times in one week. He said, "I'm not sure I like these people, but I love this record!" We were blown away by that. Whereas *The People* newspaper was saying things like, "They've just come back from playing in Germany. They should go back and stay there. We don't want them in this country."

**Did you feel much affiliation to progressive music?**
We did. But we didn't try to be like any of those bands at all. The BBC did a thing called *Heavy Metal Britannia* [2010] and they also did a prog one. And I was in both of them. They said it was because they didn't really know which we were. I thought that was rather nice, actually, because I think there's some Edgar Broughton Band stuff that's really prog in that early era of the band. But there's something else as well, which I think is very eclectic. And much more attuned to people like The Fugs or Pearls Before Swine. I love *Balaklava* [1968], that was very influential. So it really was a mixture. But I certainly would identify with prog bands. We felt part of that movement.

**You also explored that other prog signifier: the concept album. 1982's *Superchip* imagines a dystopian future where people have been implanted with microchips...**
Yeah, I think that's as close as we got to a concept album. Some of it forecasts certain things that have actually happened since, all kinds of bits and pieces. I think it was ahead of its time in a way. Certainly in terms of a group of people who only want to rip the world off and exploit us all.



Superchip: 1982's concept album.

**You're probably best known for 1970's *Out Demons Out*, which became a kind of communal exorcism at live shows. Was that song an experiment to see how far you could blur the distinction between band and audience?**
Sometimes it really was. I remember playing a festival in Germany, at the Aachen football stadium [Aachen Open Air Pop Festival, July 1970]. Some police were in the directors' box with infrared binoculars, while others were in the stadium, dragging people out by their hair for smoking dope. A young woman came past me with her head bleeding, with two great big coppers marching her out. So we did *Out Demons Out* as soon as we went on, pointing to the cops in the directors' box. And the crowd all started to turn and point too. Over and over again, in English, I said: "Unless you stop doing what you're doing, nothing else will continue. And the whole crowd will resist what you're doing." The police stayed there for about 10 minutes while the crowd was shouting, "Out Demons Out!" and in the end they gave up and walked down the stairs. After that, they were as reasonable as you might expect at any festival. So we used to do that. We'd sometimes direct it at something that was going on, or in a town where something was a big issue. But at the same time it was a cathartic thing, almost a sort of exercise for people.

**Didn't David Bowie get involved at one point?**
We knew David from when he had his little Arts Lab in Bromley, with people like the Strawbs and that sort of crew. We once shared a bill at the Dome in Brighton [1969]. I just remember hearing *Space Oddity* [while] backstage, and we all went out there to listen to this thing. Just this little beautiful guy sitting on a stool, singing, by himself. It was absolutely spellbinding. Anyway, David came onstage with us at the end to do *Out Demons Out*. The council turned the power off in the middle of it, because we'd overrun, but we carried on with drums and tambourines and congas. And of course, Dave is happily shouting his head off with me at the front of the stage. Afterwards, we both received a letter from Brighton council, banning us for life from ever appearing at the Dome again. We went to see lots of gigs of David's and I nearly got to play on one of his albums, on *Candidate* [from 1974's *Diamond Dogs*]. But he had a bit of a breakdown and went to Switzerland instead.

**Did you enjoy all that confrontational stuff?**
I did. There was this phrase going around when I was a kid, very Victorian: 'Be seen and not heard, speak when you're spoken to.' To my parents, that was anathema. That was absolutely the wrong thing to say about anything. And of course, in a rock band, there are loads of opportunities where you can say, "I'm not having that, that's not right." We just addressed things that we thought were really unfair. Some people took it a bit seriously. They thought that we were politicians, or aspired to be. It was all like, "What are you going to do next, Edgar?" "Well, we're not going to storm the Bastille! We're a rock band!" But we just happened to espouse these particular views about certain things, like we supported Release [legal advice charity for those charged with drug possession]. We did hundreds of benefits, which made people in the business say: "You'll ruin everything. You'll never get gigs, because you play for free too much." It was ludicrous. What's wrong with free music?

**Back then you were mobilising your fanbase and creating**

L-R: Ringo Starr, Lulu, David Bowie and Edgar Broughton at the Ziggy Stardust retirement party at the Hotel Café Royal on July 3, 1973.
JOHN RODGERS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Let loose with the paint cans again, Edgar?

PRESS/AL STUART

**a community, which is an idea that many artists have since adopted in the internet age. You were way ahead of the curve...**
Yeah, I think we were, certainly in terms of little publicity things. We used to carry cans of paint in boxes and give them to people. Hence, throughout the UK, there is still the odd bridge or wall with 'Out Demons Out' written on it. I quite like that. But if we'd had the internet that would really have been something.

**One notorious example took place at Keele University in 1970. What exactly happened that night?**
There were massive demonstrations going on at Kent University in Ohio, where the National Guard had shot and killed some students. And Keele, in solidarity, were putting together a series of sit-ins and asking bands to play for them. The problem was that we played in what was a newly refurbished refectory. We gave out all this paint and the students covered it with graffiti. And I have to say – and I did say this in court later – that it was the most intelligent graffiti I'd ever seen. I knew it was a bit cheeky, but I asked the judge if I could have a copy of the evidence photographs, which he didn't like at all. But we didn't care. We went to court for free concerts as well, like at Redcar and Brighton. Poor old EMI. They must've been tearing their hair out over us, but little did they know that we were paving the way for them having to deal with the Sex Pistols in the future.

**After the band split for a time in the early 80s, you became a youth worker at Wandsworth Borough Council. What did you learn from that experience?**
Working with people, you do start to learn at least what somebody might be going through. You become more sensitive to things and less judgemental. And I think that gives you an edge. One of the highlights was when some kids came to us and said, "We want a radio station." So we got a licence, put a studio together in Wandsworth and for three years we ran Fundamental FM, managed by young people. We used to get top DJs on Saturday nights. We won the first Philip Lawrence Award For Crime Prevention by young people. And we had a visit by Princess Anne. [Respected current affairs broadcaster, Sir] Trevor McDonald did an interview and we did breakfast telly. It was a really successful thing. There was also a stage when I was part of a couple of guys running young men's groups, exploring the issues of being male and all kinds of stuff.

> "Tony Blackburn played *Hotel Room* five times in one week. He said, "I'm not sure I like these people, but I love this record!"

**So how did that period influence your return to music later on?**
Well, I didn't really leave music. We were still functioning as the Edgar Broughton Band, but I think, if it influenced anything artistic in me, it's *Break The Dark*. I didn't want to be that shouty Edgar Broughton anymore. You don't really want to sit down on a Sunday afternoon and listen to an album that's too raucous. I wanted to make something that you can listen to anywhere. And I think all the experience of that work changed me quite a lot. Maybe when you get older, you do calm down, although there's bits of me that haven't at all. Unfortunately, perhaps! But there are parts that really have. And it came from a lot of those experiences of working with people and thinking about a better way to communicate.

**And you're planning to take *Break The Dark* on the road?**
Yes. At the moment, it's about what's affordable and practical and achievable. I'm certainly looking at something in April next year, where I'd like to work with a cellist, and my son Luke, and perhaps a couple of other people. More of an ensemble, a quartet or quintet. Maybe even with no drums, maybe programmed stuff. I want it to be quite different from anything I've ever done before. I just don't want to rock out with a strap around my neck, y'know.

*Break The Dark is out now via Esoteric. See www.edgarbroughton.com for more information.*

# PETER GABRIEL

The ex-Genesis singer returns to the big time with his first album in 21 years to reassert his place as the doyen of cerebral art-pop.

**Words:** Jeremy Allen **Illustration:** Pete Fowler

The last time Peter Gabriel released a whole album of original material was in 2002. Tony Blair was prime minister, Wikipedia was just getting started, and the Twin Towers in New York had barely been down a year. Given the passage of time, one has to wonder about the voice, which tends to weaken and lose precision when a singer crosses the threshold into senior citizenship.

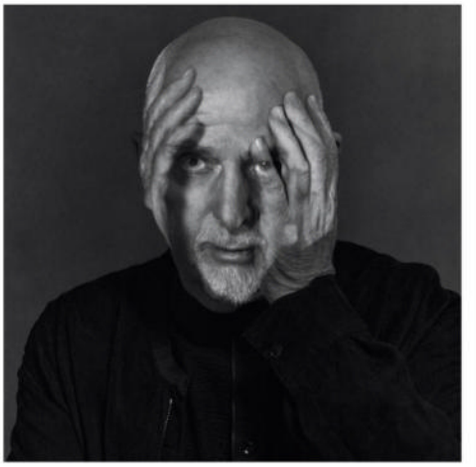
Thankfully there are no such worries with *i/o*, Peter Gabriel's 10th solo studio album, with his soulful larynx projecting even more gracefully than he did on *Where The Sour Turns To Sweet*, the opening track of Genesis' 1969 debut album *From Genesis To Revelation*. Moreover, he has the same range he drew upon for *Supper's Ready* — the surrealist prog opera from his old band's fourth album *Foxtrot* — still at his disposal. Genesis themselves closed for business last year, so to hear Gabriel soaring undiminished feels like something of a miracle.

And there's more good news. He can still write songs that turn the head and stir the heart, even if it takes him a little longer these days. *Playing For Time*, a ballad about mortality that begins with a motif from Chopin's *Marche Funèbre* and takes in the hymnal shapes of an old spiritual, feels like a song for the ages. It has the gravity of a *Blood Of Eden* or even a *Don't Give Up*, though where those songs were performed with Sinéad O'Connor and Kate Bush, respectively, here it's Gabriel on his own.

Most of the songs on *i/o* have already been released, drip-fed throughout the year to coincide with the lunar cycle. Accompanying each track has been specifically commissioned art, created by some of the world's most renowned artists, including Ai Weiwei, Olafur Eliasson and Cornelia Parker.

The first of these singles was *Panopticon*, here taking its place as the album's opening track. As the portmanteau title suggest, it references both philosopher Jeremy Bentham's cylindrical prison, the panopticon, and the digital moguls who harvest our data and spy on us. It's a barnstormer in the Gabriel songbook: cogent, catchy and thought-provoking, and also a signifier of *i/o*'s big themes.

**i/o**
VIRGIN MUSIC



> **To hear Gabriel soaring undiminished feels like a miracle.**

And so it proves: there are songs about terrorism (*Live And Let Live*), injustice (*The Court*), locked-in syndrome (*Road To Joy*) and interconnectivity (*i/o* itself), all released as singles over the past 12 months. Despite their dark themes, these songs are really about uplift in difficult times, and in each case we're in the safest of waters musically. Gabriel did apparently attempt to collaborate with EDM luminary Skrillex, a journey outside of his comfort zone that perhaps mercifully remains unreleased. Instead, we get the heartwarming *This Is Home*, about domesticity and composed in reaction to Skrillex's suggestion to write a banging tune about partying all night. Punishing beats are eschewed for a Swedish male voice choir and the orchestral arrangements of John Metcalfe.

So far, so solid, though with Gabriel there always has to be some kind of innovation. In this case, *i/o* offers different mixes for each track by two of the world's most celebrated engineers: Mark 'Spike' Stent (Madonna, U2, Ed Sheeran) who Gabriel describes as a "painter", providing the Bright-Side mixes; and Tchad Blake (Elvis Costello, U2, Sheryl Crow), "a sculptor", brings the Dark-Side mixes. They're available to buy separately on vinyl, while the CD version includes both plus a Dolby Atmos mix by Hans-Martin Buff with the In-Side mix for anyone whose living room boasts an overabundance of hi-tech speakers.

In truth, what could have been an interesting exercise in exploring the minutiae of mixing actually falls down given how similar the results are between Spike's version and Blake's version. Clearly both have done sound professional jobs that make the best of the rich resources available, making 'bright' and 'dark' essentially misnomers, given that neither feel particularly bright or dark. The release of both versions of *Olive Tree* in August was supposed to highlight the variables but merely confirmed that most people are more interested in the song than the production. Only audiophiles with especially attentive ears are likely to pick out discernible differences, with the contrasts all but negligible to the rest of us. Still, given the elephantine gestation period of this album, we'll take it in whichever format we can get it.

Gabriel recently joked that fans receiving a song each full moon was like them "getting a Lego piece each month". By that measure, *i/o* is a veritable sonic Legoland, albeit one for grown-ups, given the weighty themes. The world has changed since 2002, mostly for the worst, but it's a better place with *i/o* in it.

# MATT BERRY

**Simplicity** KPM/ACID JAZZ

**Multi-talented actor/musician records for legendary library label.**

Matt Berry's trajectory over the past 20 years is pretty extraordinary. Starting off with scene-stealing roles in prog-friendly comedies *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* and *The Mighty Boosh*, he's rapidly progressed to alternative national treasure, starring in the shows *Toast Of London* and *What We Do In The Shadows*. Yet in parallel to his acting career and OTT thespian persona, he's also proved to be a musical polymath, releasing a series of albums that cover

> **Walks in the footsteps of Alan Hawkshaw and Keith Mansfield.**

bases including folk pop, ambient, psychedelia and jazz rock. His latest project is a hook-up with library music label KPM, another national institution that's provided the classic theme tunes to numerous TV shows, from *Grandstand* and *World Of Sport* to *Grange Hill* and *Captain Pugwash*.

Walking in the footsteps of revered KPM composers such as Alan Hawkshaw, Keith Mansfield and John Cameron must have been a little daunting for Berry, but as an aficionado of vintage gear and the library music aesthetic, he pulls the project off with some aplomb. *Simplicity* is a collection of short, snappy instrumentals packed with hooks and energy, designed to be repurposed by any TV company that needs music for its latest production. As such, the tracks are entirely utilitarian and skip between genres with unself-conscious ease. Berry performs everything himself save for the drums, with Craig Blundell whipping up a flurry of snares and hats.

*Top Brass* kicks the album off, its funky beat and throbbing bass enhanced by staccato strings and horns to create maximum excitement. It's the type of orch rock mash-up that feels completely natural, and could teach prog bands who dabble in this territory a thing or two. *Driving Seat* has a propulsive, *One Of These Days*-style undercarriage, while *Set The Scene* begins with some moody synth before the tempo picks up with a groovy squall of organ. What's great about these tracks is their sense of immediacy, as though they've been lovingly dashed off in a few hours of available studio time, in homage to the way that library musicians often had to work.

*Simple Basics* sounds like it could be the theme to a current affairs show for kids before moving into spacier territory, with jazzy guitar and Philly strings building to a great climax. *Too Many Hats* is even wilder, encompassing chin-stroking piano and synth, a tango section and some *Shaft*-esque wah-wah. And *Telescopic* rounds things off nicely with tense thriller vibes, all drifting Rhodes and stalking bass as an assassin lines up their latest target...

*Simplicity* is great fun and another string to Berry's already impressive bow.

**JOE BANKS**

# 35 TAPES

**Fabric Of Time** APOLLON

**Norwegian progophiles continue to channel classic influences.**

On their third album release since forming in 2018, this Oslo-based collective of seasoned musicians seem to be fine-tuning their patchwork of vintage 70s prog inspirations and perfecting the skill of making a musical magic eye picture – something that appears chaotic on first encounter but weaves together beautifully once the brain tunes in.

When the listener is confronted with a lurching, three-legged time-signature there's a fear that we're heading for uninspiring generic prog territory, and on initial listens, it then feels as if they're drifting along without much of a prominent melodic thread to follow. But then, when the central songcraft of *Whistling For The Wind* starts to cut through, and Jarle Wangen's yearning vocal melody makes its mark on *Crawling*, the arresting guitar skytrails from Morten Lund suddenly make sense and the Banksian piano and Wakeman-style synth trills of the title track prick up the ears along with Hackett-like fret interjections. The duetting vocal contribution of Bel Canto's Anneli Drecker in the album's closing passages make for an ear-pricking finale, and the temptation to go round again becomes irresistible. **JS**

# A FLYING FISH

**El Pez Que Voló - Act I** APOLLON RECORDS/GYMNOCAL INDUSTRIES

**Kaleidoscopic lunacy from Mexico's premier space opera operatives.**

There's a lot going on in *El Pez Que Voló – Act I*, a concept album from A Flying Fish, who are either a Mexican prog band or an "interdimensional storyteller" named Râhoola, depending on who you believe. It's complicated. And so is the concept, which involves Teezûck, a depressed half-bird/half-fish creature who journeys to seek his destiny after receiving a stellar vision.

The spectre of Devin Townsend looms large, as if Ziltoid The Omniscient's Monterrey franchise has turned in its annual report. There's Disney strings, party whistles, silly voices, various clangs and gurgles and a brief flurry of space samba – bits of *A He-Kuree Dream* sound like Ary Barroso's *Aquarela Do Brasil* played by the cantina bar from *Star Wars*. At other times, the music sounds like it was written for the West End stage but swiftly discarded for being too freakish.

Occasionally the melodies threaten to bounce into Andrew LLoyd Webber territory, but are saved by a demented instrumental interlude or a choir that sounds like it's been busy crushing galaxies. And from time to time – as on *Mama, Papa!* – it's also rather beautiful. Roll on *Act II*. **FL**

# AIRBRIDGE

**Openings** AIRBRIDGEPROG.BANDCAMP.COM

**Reformed Norwich neo-proggers continue their belated return.**

When these veterans of the early 80s Marquee scene released their album *Memories Of Water* in 2021, it was no less than 38 years after their sole previous long-player.

On this significantly less belated follow-up, they retain a certain likeable yet frustrating amateurish feel, such that much of *Openings* resembles hippyish whimsy and sung-talk musings light on inviting access points. Lorenzo Bedini and Dave Dowdeswell-Allaway share vocals and their reedy tones fail to lift meandering, free-form tunes – even when they bank up vocal tracks with a guest singer on the à capella *That Big Small Step*. Elsewhere, the instrumentation frequently sounds loosely arranged and shambling. Brighter spots are penultimate track *Europa*, which builds from evocative acoustica into an anthemic soft rock swell backed by choirs and orchestral accompaniment.

A contrasting charmer is *Hey There!*, sung by Dowdeswell-Allaway from the point of view of his nine-year-old self, a Caravan-esque ditty laced with nostalgic humour. Yet elsewhere when they play for laughs, *Dead Man's Porn* ends with heavy breathing suggestive of, well, guess what? An eccentric, uneven affair. **JS**

## DAVID CROSS BAND

**Ice Blue, Silver Sky** NOISY/CHERRY RED RECORDS

**The sum is greater than its parts on this remarkable British prog album.**

The first release from the ex-King Crimson violinist under the David Cross Band banner since 2016, *Ice Blue, Silver Sky* proves worth the wait. Opener *Nurse Insane* delivers an echoing thump, a brief burst of à capella vocals and a lengthy collage of dialogue against a small string ensemble, before it explodes into a heavy rock stormer of a song, rather establishing the ground for the album as a whole.

Old Crimson tracks *Exiles* and *Starless* are given new treatments. The latter remains close to the original with some additional explorations during the middle section. Cross has reimagined *Exiles* before, but here it becomes a somewhat different journey again with a lush, strings-based ballad-like intro segueing into a violin solo against an ambient space-rock synth arpeggio. In both cases, vocalist Jinian Wilde does a marvellous job, capturing some of the essence of John Wetton's delivery while putting his own stamp on the tracks.

Covers aside, this is certainly no quasi-Crimson tribute – Cross and his band find a sound very much their own, massively entertaining yet thoughtful, accessible yet intriguing. **GMM**

## ROGER ENO

**The Skies, They Shift Like Chords...** DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

**Haunting and moving post-ambient compositions.**

The phrase 'slow burn' might have been designed for Roger Eno. With a richly diverse 40-year back catalogue, it's really only since 2022's *The Turning Year*, his ravishing solo debut on the Deutsche Grammophon classical music label, that he's been getting anything like the mainstream attention he really deserves.

His latest release for the label again features the signature sound of his sedate piano. Variously evoking a slowly dissolving montage of images and feelings, it's surprisingly emotional. Simple yet telling melodies dominate pensive tunes adorned with restrained orchestral shading, dustings of harmonic atmospherics and melancholic clarinet that pull at the heartstrings. Some conjure grey hinterlands, while others are illuminated with a hopeful radiance. Often bringing to mind that graceful state in which the music of Erik Satie, Arvo Pärt and Harold Budd resonate, the silvery thread of a solitary vocal performance by Eno's daughter, Cecily, tethers the spiritual to the temporal.

For an album whose underlying concepts explore the notion of transience, Eno has sculpted something that's both tangible and lasting. **SS**

## NICK FLETCHER

**Quadvirium** ROUGH DRAFT AUDIO

**Superb jazz rock musings from British guitarist.**

Having spent almost three decades working successfully as a guitarist, composer and producer in the world of classical music, Nick Fletcher has enjoyed growing recognition in recent years for his prog credentials as a talented and versatile player, both as a member of the John Hackett Band for and his collaborations with other artists.

*Quadvirium* sees him team up with former Jeff Beck drummer Anika Nilles, ex-Bill Bruford's Earthworks bassist Tim Harries and keyboard player Caroline Bonnett to produce high intensity fusion (*Overture To The Cosmos, Fifth Parallel*), smooth electric jazz (*Aphelion, The Helix)* and dreamy melodic ambience as heard on the two-part *Ziggurat Of Dreams.*

Channelling such visionary guitarists as Pat Metheny, John McLaughlin, Allan Holdsworth and even David Gilmour – opener *A Wave On The Ocean Of Eternity* is really quite Floydian – Fletcher covers much ground here. There is an overarching high concept with every track being inspired by one of Plato's Four Noble Arts: maths, geometry, music and astronomy. Technically adept yet never feeling clinical or forced, this is cerebral music with a very human heart. **GMM**

## MARIUSZ DUDA

**AFR AI D** KSCOPE

**Riverside frontman suggests AI might not be so scary.**

It'd be easy to begin this review with a joke about AI writing it, but *Prog* is too classy for such an open goal. And indeed Mariusz Duda's instrumental album is, he's said, not intended to confirm society's much-voiced fears about the growth surge of artificial intelligence in recent times. Although that title, or specifically its typography, rings of "wake up, sheeple" bumptiousness, he eschews the obvious route and, overall, embraces the idea of new tools and "the future". At least he does in his accompanying statements. As an instrumental work, the album takes on its own identity, shapeshifting frequently. Let's just hope it doesn't lock the fridge or empty the bank account while we're distracted by it.

> **Electronica with phases of shivering ominousness.**

Duda has established his musical career outside of accomplished Polish rock band Riverside with his mercurial Lunatic Soul project, and now he releases under his own name. His last offering, *The Lockdown Trilogy*, inspired by a youthful fondness for Tangerine Dream and Jean-Michel Jarre, was paranoid, intimate and wilfully unsettling. While it'd be glib to suggest the changeable weather of this album constitutes a warmer, more welcoming work, it does often lean that way. Apparently motivated by exploration of ChatGPT, Midjourney and deep fakes, it's electronica with phases of shivering ominousness and chilly doubt, but also spells of receptive, wide-eyed wonder.

And while Duda plays almost everything, the guitar solos from Mateusz Owczarek are a crucial element, coming in sparingly but conveying an effect which yields something human, emotive and reassuring. As if the robots are smiling and those smiles are convincing rather than uncanny.

The opening *Taming Nightmares* is a red herring, with spooky emissions (are those dogs barking?) and horror-movie drones and bleeps suggesting we're in a twitchy twilight zone. This settles, though, into a cycle of electronics with a half-loping, half-limping gait. *Good Morning Fearmongering* is more mischievous and upbeat, while *Fake Me Deep, Murf* similarly seems more fascinated by tomorrow's technology than wary of it. Such tracks can be enjoyed without pondering Duda's declared themes, but *I Love To Chat With You*, with treated voices wobbling in and out, is more explicitly on subject.

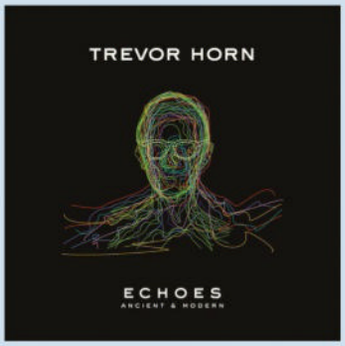
*Why So Serious Cassandra*, with bouncy beats and velvety synth swathes, emphasises that Duda is opening channels, not calling for a ban on androids. The finale, *Embracing The Unknown*, with keyboard notes introducing an edifice of percussive grandeur, is a stirring summing-up. His advocacy for AI is compelling. Let's just hope musicians don't come to look back on it as the serpent in Eden.

**CHRIS ROBERTS**

# TREVOR HORN

## Echoes - Ancient & Modern DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

**Maverick producer's ongoing journey through cover versions.**




The last album to feature Trevor Horn's name above the door, 2019's *Reimagines The Eighties*, found the unofficial Global MD Of Shiny Left-field Pop covering a host of decade-specific tracks from the likes of David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen and his own past collaborators with Grace Jones, Frankie Goes To Hollywood and Yes, with help from an all-star array of guest vocalists ranging from Robbie Williams to Steve Hogarth.

**Steve Hogarth is a revelation on a cover of The Cars' *Drive*.**

This follow-up takes the same approach, but tweaks the time frame slightly, allowing a handful of tracks from the 1990s and beyond. The cast list included this time finds Hogarth and fellow returnee Seal joined by an impressive, if seemingly random, array of singers ranging from Iggy Pop and Marc Almond to Rick Astley and lockdown showbiz royalty Toyah and Robert Fripp.

Horn has reduced the tempo of a lot of the songs here, detuning the musical excess of previous decades and lending it the effect of a dream-like state. This works fantastically well on Pat Benatar's *Love Is A Battlefield*, with Marc Almond revoicing it as a skeletal torch ballad over pulsing synths and swooning strings; Tori Amos adds vulnerability to rapper Kendrick Lamar's 2012 single *Swimming Pools (Drank)*; and Lady Blackbird — who has been dubbed 'The Jazz Grace Jones' — stamps her authority all over *Slave To The Rhythm*.

So far, so art-pop. But there are links to Trevor Horn the prog maven, most notably in the shape of the splendid, downbeat version of Yes' Horn-produced *Owner Of A Lonely Heart*. The producer himself sang a version of the same on *Reimagines The Eighties*, but here he delegates the job to Rick Astley, who turns in a soulful vocal. Steve Hogarth is a revelation on The Cars' *Drive* (Horn has suggested the Marillion singer has a voice like that of Harry Nilsson, and he's not wrong). And in one of the greatest pairings on the album, Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Relax* is deconstructed by the inseparable Toyah/Fripp tag team. The only disappointment here is Iggy Pop's take on Depeche Mode's *Personal Jesus* — a by-numbers version that doesn't capture the genius of any of the parties involved.

*Echoes — Ancient & Modern* closes in true 'And this is me...' style, with Horn singing his only vocal. His take on *Avalon* is rather beautiful, reminding the listener just how few people cover Roxy Music songs (maybe because Bryan Ferry's voice is so definitive). It's a fine sign-off for a record that delivers exactly what listeners would expect — exquisitely crafted covers delivered with elan, painstakingly produced with plenty of heart.

**DARYL EASLEA**

# THE FUSION SYNDICATE

## A Speedway On Saturn's Rings PURPLE PYRAMID/CLEOPATRA

**A prog/rock journey through the fusion firmament with a cosmic crew.**

Masterminded and composed by multi-instrumentalist Fernando Perdomo, this follow-up to The Fusion Syndicate's self-titled 2012 debut is a collection of instrumental jazz/rock cuts with a core rhythm section of Chester Thompson on drums and bass from Jah Wobble, plus a lengthy and varied guest list of other musos.

Although varied in pace and mood, the main emphasis is more rock than jazz. The tracks here mostly set up grooves, chord progressions and foundation riffs, which act as springboards for lengthy, sometimes incendiary, occasionally indulgent, guitar and keyboard soloing from some stellar names – Al Di Meola's angular melodies and bursts of shredding on the title track are terrific and Rick Wakeman's contributions to the vaguely threatening *IO* are veritable prog manna.

A peculiarity here is the only actual song, a cover of Gil Scott Heron's *The Bottle*, which, while respectful to the original, does feel like it was destined for a different album.

The CD version comes with four bonus tracks, remixed from the debut album, which are decidedly more jazz-orientated and exploratory/improvisational in nature. **GMM**

# GLASS HAMMER

## Arise ARION RECORDS

**Satisfying but safe adventure from the veteran prog rock ensemble.**

It's only been a year since Glass Hammer released their last album, *At The Gate*, yet they're already back with another batch of tunes. A sci-fi concept record, *Arise* – an acronym for Android Research Initiative for Space Exploration – delivers what fans expect but not much more.

Prelude *Launch Of The Daedalus* is enjoyably mysterious and vibrant thanks to its array of cosmic textures and suspenseful percussion, whereas its sparser instrumental sibling *Mare Sirenum* is wonderfully touching. Both pieces demonstrate Glass Hammer's knack for crafting intriguing and complex soundscapes, just as rockers *Wolf 359* and *Arion (18 Delphini B)* incorporate multiple vocal styles and lively instrumentation for some dynamic compositions.

It's likeable yet undeniably familiar. Throw in the simultaneously bland and chaotic ballad *Lost*, the generic metal pastiche *Proxima Centauri B*, and self-indulgent closing jam – *The Return Of Daedalus* – and roughly one-third of the collection even outstays its welcome halfway into the experience. *Arise* is certainly a good record overall, but its inability to explore fresher musical territories is disappointingly ironic. **JMB**

# HARP

## Albion BELLA UNION

**Former Midlake singer Tim Smith and wife Kathi Zung's prog folk debut.**

Midlake's 2006 concept LP *The Trials Of Van Occupanther* and its folkier, Pentangle and Fairport Convention-influenced follow-up *The Courage Of Others* were largely the brainchild of Tim Smith. His wistful, evocative songwriting has sometimes seemed to yearn for ancient, more mystical times, and *Albion* – the Denton, Texas-raised Smith's romantic take on a Britain long gone – has an old soul, too.

Cloaked and ghostly-looking on the cover, Smith employs flutes and 12-string guitars to wonderful effect. The plaintive ache of his voice is the perfect vehicle for the cryptic, autumnal-sounding *I Am The Seed* and *Daughters Of Albion*, while Smith's wife Kathi Zung programmed the mostly naturalistic-sounding drums.

Smith has cited The Cure and Cocteau Twins as inspirations on *Albion*, but their influence is worn lightly, only really audible on the odd flanged or chorused guitar. Instrumental *Moon*, meanwhile, conjures Steve Hackett circa *Voyage Of The Acolyte*, while choral-led closer *Herstmonceux*, named after a medieval castle in East Sussex, is just wonderful; wide-eyed and earnest in the best possible sense of the word. **JMN**

## JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

**Oxymoreworks** SONY

**Veteran sage of synths still vibrant on dancefloor-friendly collaborative album.**

At 75, French composer Jean-Michel Jarre is still more intrigued by the future than the past. His 2022 album *Oxymore* was fascinated by spatial 3D sound and sampled the musique concrète of Pierre Henry to make a risky, challenging proposition. This sort of spin-off endeavours to push it further, although bringing in big guest names offers a way in for previously intimidated listeners.

Nine tracks are reworked with collaborators ranging from Dutch DJ Armin Van Buren to Russian-born turntablist Nina Kraviz. *Brutalism Take 2* opens a dialogue with Depeche Mode's Martin Gore, and it doesn't shy away from a backbeat of crunching heaviness. *Brutalism Reprise* with Deathpact, on the other hand, teases out the techno hypnotism of the blueprint. Brian Eno visits for *Epica Extension*, which eventually edges into contemporary rhythms Eno may have picked up from his *Top Boy* project. *Synthy Sisters Take 2*, with Adiescar Chase, is a warm, rippling moment of reflection, although the Van Buren team-up, *Epica Maxima*, has at least half an eye on the dancefloor. The overall takeaway is that Jarre continues to coax electronica any which way he chooses. **CR**

## DAVE KERZNER

**Heart Land Mines Vol 1** SONICELEMENTS.BANDCAMP.COM

**Versatile American's fourth solo set.**

Dave Kerzner has been a central figure on the US prog scene for the best part of three decades. His various endeavours range from music software company Sound Reality Inc to his work with everyone from Keith Emerson to Francis Dunnery.

Amid all that, he's continued to work on his own compositions, and this fourth studio set under his own name is inspired by a road trip across the US that he took in the late 1990s, as explained on sweet acoustic opener *True Story Pt 1*, which segues into the stirring, Alan Parsons-style drama of *Eye Of The Storm*. The wistful nostalgia of *Back To One* and the heartbroken *Genevieve* are equally charming, even if his fondness for well-worn phrases (the titular lady is a *'wolf in sheep's clothing'* who *'will turn your heart to stone'*) borders on cliché at times.

When he dabbles in country pop pastiche, mocking music biz wannabes on *Dreaming In LA* and lairy barroom blues rock on *Dirty Girl*, he has a more Marmite appeal, but he's playing to his strengths when he echoes Yes' banks of vocal harmonies on *Pushed Me Out*, or blends Floydian resignation with Porcupine Tree-style staccato riffing on *Manic Calm*. **JS**

## MOSTLY AUTUMN

**Studio 2** MOSTLY AUTUMN RECORDS

**Folk rockers live from Abbey Road.**

Mostly Autumn were understandably excited when they got the chance to record a live album in the legendary Studio 2 of London's Abbey Road, where The Beatles made their greatest recordings. Yet a less sentimental observer might ask: what's in it for us? After all, the net result comes without either crowd atmospherics or the galvanised performance that can result from it.

As it is, though, the York-based band still sound as if the setting has drawn out new facets of their music. Without the extra sonic swell surrounding it, *Passengers* doesn't have quite the same quiet-loud drama as the original, but its more low-key performance lets the song breathe more organically. *Silver Glass* sounds all the more alluring due to the less performative vocal approach Olivia Sparnenn-Josh adopts, while husband Bryan Josh's soloing has an extra emotive quality. Then one of the band's oldest songs, the 10-minute *Heroes Never Die*, benefits from Josh's voice and guitar-playing having matured since the original was made. And if, overall, these takes don't have the same production polish as the originals, the stirring passion behind them is all the more keenly felt. **JS**

## MOON SAFARI

**Himlabacken Vol 2** BLOMLJUD RECORDS

**Swedes map out belated successor to 2013's conceptual gem.**

Moon Safari's *Himlabacken Vol 1* hit big with fans of symphonic prog upon its release in 2013. Anticipation of a follow-up changed from 'keen' to 'hoping forlornly' as the years passed. But it's finally here. And there's so much care and attention to detail in the new album, it's like perusing a map of Middle-earth on the frontispiece of a particularly grand hardback edition of *The Lord Of The Rings*. Continuing the epic and episodic theme of sunny childhood memories, this sequel is presented as a continuation of its predecessor. And while *Vol 2* extends some of the cheerful motifs of childhood reminiscence, it also adds reflective, darker, 'growing up' moments.

> **A worthy successor to the debut after all these years.**

Opener *198X (Heaven Hill)*, the subtitle of which is the literal meaning of 'Himlabacken', is thoroughly positive prog. Warm, bright 1980s synths are overlain by ultra-chirpy Freiheit-meets-Queen harmonies that almost make the perkier moments of Spock's Beard's catalogue sound dour. The 10-minute-plus *Between The Devil And Me* also radiates a fervent sparkiness, with instrumental pyrotechnics and a vocal blend that recall prime-time Styx. The more compact *Emma Come On* has monophonic keyboard shrieks and spirals of guitar that scream pure 1970s FM-radio gorgeousness. Any danger of overkill is avoided via these set pieces being offset by the likes of *Beyond The Blue*, a shorter, calmer vocal meditation that deserves to be accompanied by aerial shots of — to quote the sleeve notes of Yes' *Tormato* — "faraway places with strange-sounding names".

But even the many widescreen moments are mere amuse-bouche to the colossus that is the fabulously named, 21-minute *Teen Angel Meets The Apocalypse*. This has everything a self-respecting 21st-century prog opus should. Stately swathes of melodic guitar begin the musical journey, followed by stomping-goblin work-song chants, fierce Hammond work, Rick Wakeman-riding-a-plesiosaur keyboard soloing, and lashings of vocal duelling between Petter Sandström and Simon Åkesson. There's even a jaunty McCartney-ish interlude at 13 minutes in, strongly redolent of the ingenuity he experimented with on 1971's underrated, prog-friendly *Ram*. This all leads up to Pontus Åkesson's Hackett-meets-Gilmour solo break sweeping in, followed by a glorious choral denouement. *'We don't need religion, 'cos we've got rock'n'roll,'* they sing in unison.

It was a potentially tricky task, but Moon Safari can consider *Himlabacken Vol 2* a very worthy successor after all these years. Let's hope the next entry in their catalogue won't be delayed until 2033.

**PAUL GING**

# UNPROCESSED

## ... And Everything In Between UNIVERSAL

**Technical prog metallers return with their boldest album yet.**

Germany's Unprocessed have made a name for themselves over the past decade by creating raw, technical, prog metal soundscapes that are accessible yet impressive. Their third full-length album, *...And Everything In Between* sees them push their sound to its limits and back again. Opening track *Hell* is as true a manifestation of the underworld that a band could achieve within the limits of prog, with naughty guttural vocals intertwined with

> **Futuristic and bold, the sound of a band shifting into top gear.**

contrasting sweeping riffs that reach angelic heights. Combine that with Manuel Gardner Fernandes' soaring clean singing and what results is a potent cocktail of addictive modern prog.

Unprocessed demonstrate their versatility with *Abysm*, which initially evokes Sleep Token, with a stripped-back, eerie synth and melodic vocal which echoes throughout. Moments of silence pierce the soundscape abruptly before the chorus crashes in, surrounded by distorted guitars and thunderous drum-fills that shatter the earth, and by the time the harsh vocals join the cacophony of noise, it's almost on the precipice of becoming overwhelming before everything dies down and the band lay out a warm, cosy, proggy blanket. *Abysm* is the track to keep hitting repeat on. It's so complex and diverse while staying true to Unprocessed's roots. This is a masterclass in how to evolve as a band.

Gone is the pristine shine that dominated Unprocessed's back catalogue. Crucially, they've also ditched the pseudo R&B element that they tried so hard to incorporate in predecessor *Gold*. It's replaced with a grit, a determination, an almost vitriol that is a welcome arrival. Unprocessed aren't here to be indifferent or dispassionate, and tracks such as lead single *Thrash* demonstrate this with the frenetic pace and screamed vocals of a calibre the German outfit has fallen short of delivering in the past. *Die On The Cross Of The Martyr* delivers infectious hooks that deserve repeat plays, and a surprise appearance from Polyphia's Tim Henson and Scott LePage elevates the album to new heights, as their recent tourmates add their own touch of opulent yet intrepid prog to the mix. The final extended distortion of *Purgatory* is cut abruptly short to a repetitive, monotone thud to bring a striking end to a striking album.

For a band who previously relied on pretty riffs and delicate vocals, Unprocessed have taken a huge risk on their third album, hurling the listener around like a malfunctioning fairground ride and returning them to safety just before it gets overwhelming. Futuristic and bold, *...And Everything In Between* finds them shifting into top gear.

**CHERI FAULKNER**

# BILL NELSON

## All The Fun Of The Fair SONOLUXE

**Prolific maestro revs up a rollercoaster.**

Like stray dodgems hijacking the waltzers, Bill Nelson's latest album is a hectic, thoroughly unpredictable adventure. The bulk of it was initially surplus material from this year's *Marvellous Realms*, though four newly written tracks have muscled in.

It's mostly song-based, with a smattering of instrumentals. This being Nelson, the songs tend to defy obvious structures and spin off in faintly crazed directions, careering into the candyfloss stall. It's always a blast; often exhilarating. He's made both introspective and flamboyant music in his time: this comes close to grinning.

From the feedback swirl and reverse-guitar buzz of *Beams Of Light*, the heat is on. *Beep Beep Beep* is a pop shuffle with Nelson essaying a half-spoken, half-crooned vocal style, which sits well among the flurries of guitar noodling.

And there is a lot of noodling on this album, but as it's Bill Nelson doing it, it never gets boring. The tracks all take surprise twists, like the loopy gravitas of *Roundabouts And Swings* or the peculiarly charged energy of *Chelsea Flash*. A sea of tranquillity arrives with *The House Of Morpheus*, but overall this is a feverish frolic from the evergreen Yorkshireman. **CR**

# THE OCULIST

## Cautionary Tales WEARETHEOCULIST.BANDCAMP.COM

**Neo-prog with a shiny metallic edge.**

The Oculist finds ex-Karnataka keyboard player Çağrı Tozluoğlu teaming up with vocalist and guitarist Adam Dunn for an album of metal-tinged prog. Musically, it's very much in a contemporary prog vein, with bright production and arrangements that frame Tozluoğlu's bubbling, tumbling synth lines against Dunn's steady riffing.

It's Dunn who really brings out the metal side of the record, particularly when he swaps clean singing for a deeper, growlier delivery. *Long Haul* finds him approaching a black metal snarl, although the music remains situated in heavy prog rock, which all makes for a distinctive contrast. At the other end of the spectrum, *Lavender* is a pleasing ballad with a guest appearance from vocalist Kerry O'Dowd, and Dunn swaps weighty riffs for an acoustic guitar.

Some tracks would benefit from a trim as The Oculist often seem to settle into a holding pattern on a groove, but the only song that doesn't land is *King Fool*, a maze of odd measures that wants for a memorable hook. Stronger is the album's closing track *Swan Dive*, an energetic prog metal showcase from this promising new duo. **DW**

# POLAR SON

## Wax/Wane POLARSON.BANDCAMP.COM

**Atmospheric Brightonians mix math and post-rock on their well paced debut.**

When these young Brits first appeared as Porshyne in 2017, they held much promise. Nestled in the middle of a three-part Venn diagram of post-rock, math rock and prog, their sound flirted equally with underground and mainstream audiences.

They've re-emerged after a pandemic-related hiatus as Polar Son, sounding reinvigorated. Intricate, Radiohead-style moodiness and bubbling electronic undercurrents are newly added flavours that contribute to their atmospheric yet frenetic whole. Opener *Youth*, which is all post-hardcore fury, groove and oscillating guitars, proves to be a red herring as the record's blueprint is largely one of slow-burning, calculated craftsmanship.

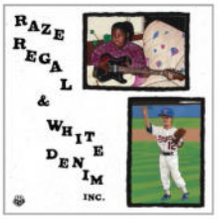
*Gangrene* skits across ghost note-laced drums and vocalist Fergal Eoin Lynden's carefully careening melodies, while *Ends Up The Same*'s resonant acoustic guitars delicately subside for a patiently executed and agitated climax. *Listen*'s unsettled melancholia and *Interlude*'s post-traumatic tenderness deliver stylish, slow-motion crescendos.

This is the fresh start the band needed. If they stick around, their future is blindingly bright. **POW**

## RAZE REGAL & WHITE DENIM INC.

**Raze Regal & White Denim Inc.** BELLA UNION

**Wild influences collide when psychedelic jazz-soul guitarists team up.**




Anyone following Austin, Texas band White Denim over the last two decades will be aware of their wide musical palette, from rock to indie to psych to boogie to prog, giving King Gizzard a run for their dollar in attempting to adopt almost every genre under the sun.

Vocalist-guitarist James Petralli has teamed with Raze Regal, an older, encyclopaedic guitarist who played with the excellent prog-pop art-rockers Once And Future Band. Their partnership is founded on a mutual appreciation of soul, jazz fusion, blues and XTC. Is the latter apparent? Partially, on the itchy groove of *Ugly Man Suit* and the third-way guitar approach in tracks such as *Idle Later*, but generally the mood is more Dukes Of Stratosphear in terms of 60s composition and experimental texturing, with 10cc, Steely Dan, MGMT and Flaming Lips coming across in various waves beneath a woozy psych production job.

It's a melting pot of eras and styles that's a real mood elevator. Sax, synths and marimba add accents beneath Petralli's soulful vocals as drummer Jeff Olsen energetically creates momentum, and other White Denim family members provide support. **JK**

## RAINBURN

**Vignettes** RAINBURN.BANDCAMP.COM

**Bangalore proggers bring fire and focus on second album.**

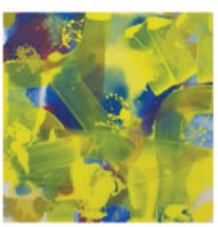
Rainburn have been pivotal players in India's progressive scene and *Vignettes* proves they're worthy torch-bearers for the movement. They've a changed line-up from 2018's debut album, *Insignify*, with guitarist-vocalist Vats Iyengar accompanied by Saakallya Biswas (guitars) and Neilroy Miranda (drums), though the fat-free songwriting and prog mini-epics remain.

*Listen Through The Noise*'s gliding vocal hooks mask the wonky riffs that snake beneath it, while *Outrage-Seeking Generation Z Brain* fuses odd rhythmical patterns with a sizable grunge rock chorus. There's an eagerness to explore new territories too, with the cocktail reception funk of *Party People* featuring a luxurious sax solo. *Siesta* unfurls a singular, shimmery guitar for an iridescent interlude before *Bad Cop/Bad Cop*'s adrenalised clangour, showcasing both extremes of their sound. Elsewhere, *False Positive* hitches witty-yet-cynical lyrics to lofty gang vocals and angry, oppressed outbursts for an action-packed four minutes. It typifies *Vignettes*' finely executed marriage of sonic exploration with captivating and contained songwriting. **POW**

## PHILIP SELWAY & ELYSIAN COLLECTIVE

**Live At Evolution Studios** BELLA UNION

**Radiohead man revisits this year's *Strange Dance*, plus extras.**



While many of his contemporaries are in the habit of offering expanded 'deluxe' versions of their albums just a few months after the original release, Radiohead drummer Philip Selway has chosen a different path. Following this year's acclaimed *Strange Dance*, here are six live-in-the-studio readings of songs from the album plus a couple of extra cuts, as rehearsed for his recent tour with a string quartet and percussionist Chris Vatalaro.

*Check For Signs Of Life* doesn't miss the skittering beats redolent of his main band, which seemed a touch superfluous on *Strange Dance*, and his vocals are less whispered on that track, as they are on *Little Things*. It makes them arguably more affecting for it, while elsewhere the tumbling piano lacing *People Of The Sea*, from his soundtrack to *Carmilla*, makes an entrancing deep cut. The previously unreleased acoustic paean *Song For Us* is another low-key but captivating moment.

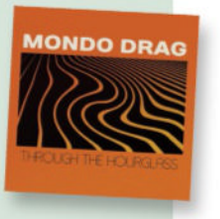
So it's a sibling release that's a tempting prospect in its own right, though it could be worth waiting to see if both albums get repacked together in the near future. **JS**

# PSYCHEDELIC PROG

Take a trip with **Rob Hughes** as he seeks out the latest mind-expanding music.

US experimentalist Kip Uhlhorn has been **Cloudland Canyon**'s pilot for over 20 years now, navigating psychedelia, alt-rock, ambient drone and more besides. *Cloudland Canyon* (Medical) finds the sometime Wayne Coyne and Sonic Boom collaborator take AI as his primary inspiration, creating electro-based pieces that pulse and fizz in all the right places. Giorgio Moroder haunts the post-techno *Internet Dreams*, there are echoes of John Carpenter in *LV MCHNS* and the skittery *Future Perfect (Bad Decision)* owes a great deal to Neu! and Harmonia.

On a similar tack, LA-based **Hooveriii** (pronounced 'Hoover 3') have largely dispensed with their usual guitar-rock and broken out the synths for fourth album *Pointe* (The Reverberation Appreciation Society/Levitation). Taking cues from obscure 60s psych pop and Tangerine Dream, Bert Hoover's band cook up driving grooves, blissful ambience and infectious cosmic disco. They've not quite given up old habits though, as proven by distorted nine-minute epic *The Ship That I Sail*.

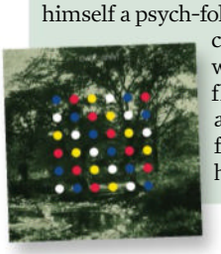



Fellow Californians **Mondo Drag** also tilt at something grand and explosive on *Through The Hourglass* (RidingEasy), namely prog-friendly centrepiece *Passages*. Their first album in eight years finds singer/keyboardist John Gamiño taking stock of loss, grief and creative stasis on an introspective set that veers between the slo-mo stonerisms of *Burning Daylight Pt 1* and the melancholic *Death In Spring*.

For unhurried dream pop, look no further than Mexico City duo Estrella del Sol and Sebastian Neyra, aka **Mint Field**. Drummer Callum Brown (of our very own Ulrika Spacek) is aboard too for *Aprender A Ser* (Felte), whose English translation — 'Learn To Be' — is a perfect descriptor for its horizontally-inclined songs, be it the shoegazing *El Suspiro Cambia Todo* or the rhythmic surges of *Puerta Abierta*.

By contrast, **Anton Barbeau**'s *Morgenmusik/Nachtschlager* (Gare du Nord) serves up a banquet of self-styled "pre-apocalyptic psychedelic pop". A double album recorded in both Berlin and Sacramento, its musical remit is equally wide, embracing hairy freak folk, avant-rock and hallucinogenic funk — all tied together by fake ads for Granny's Gummy Crumpets, KANT FM and other delights. Guests include XTC's Colin Moulding, Julian Cope ally Donald Ross Skinner and ex-Soft Boys/Egyptians Andy Metcalfe and Morris Windsor.

Arguably the best of this month's bunch, however, is *Spirit* (Heavy Psych Sounds), the second solo effort from Danish-French singer-songwriter **Emile**. Away from his other gig with acid rockers The Sonic Dawn, Emile Bureau proves himself a psych-folk connoisseur, delivering spectral songs centred around acoustic guitar, embellished with trippy organ and bucolic Eastern flavours. The late 60s counterculture serves as chief nourishment, as evinced by the fabulous *Nocturnal* and adventurous highlight, *Thunderbird*.



# THE WITCHING TALE

**What Magic Is This?** BELLISSIMA RECORDS

**Second helping of eeriness from Katharine Blake and Michael J York.**

Something strange this way comes to transport all those who encounter it to an unsettling yet oddly welcoming realm where supernatural beings and forces dance and walk among us. Which shouldn't come as too much of a surprise knowing that pair casting these irresistible spells are singer Katharine Blake, the driving force behind Mediæval Bæbes and the recently resurrected Miranda Sex Garden, and multi-instrumentalist Michael J York, whose own magic

> **Elicits memories of the nation's more creepy TV shows.**

touch is imprinted on the music of outliers Coil, Current 93 and Téléplasmiste as well The Utopia Strong with co-conspirators Steve Davis and Kavus Torabi.

Posing by a pair of impressive standing stones for the album's cover, Blake and York have moved on from the cowl-draped couple that adorned the artwork of their eponymous debut album. Eliciting memories of the more creepy TV programmes that inveigled their way into the nation's living rooms — see *Escape Into The Night*, *Timeslip* and John Mills in *Quatermass* — the music contained across the nine tracks here transcends what's being hinted at. Little wonder, then, that Blake's lyrical inspirations are the horror and sci-fi movies that she loves so much.

But it's not just those themes that beguile; it's also the music. Using a wide variety of instruments including synths, bagpipes, the double reed duduk and electric guitar, York is joined by Charlie Cawood's lyre, gothic lap harp, zither, guzheng, taishogoto and Catherine Gerbrands' musical saw. The result is the kind of weirdness that ran through the works of HP Lovecraft. Almost floating like an apparition, the music — at first listen — appears to be disconnected with Blake's concerns but, like a séance that brings together the living and the spirits of the dead, soon fuses with Blake's ethereal voice while somehow still standing apart from it.

Witness *They Will Come*, wherein Blake sings of parasitic alien invaders who can only feed on humans while they sleep. Is the music running counter to the singing? Or is it a strange fusion that manifests and reveals itself with repeated listens? Elsewhere, *Born In A Moment Again* is a tentative dance that shows its true fusion as a reward for working with it. So while this isn't physically active music, the mind is alert throughout. And yet the moment the psyche surrenders, all becomes clear. Most immediate is the ritual sacrifice at the heart of *Within Her Flame* that runs with the baton passed on by Manuel Göttsching's experiments with repetition.

But stick at it. *What Magic Is This?* is filled with an eldritch sensibility, and the rewards it delivers are commensurate with the work put in.

**JULIAN MARSZALEK**

# SIMPLE MINDS

**New Gold Dream - Live From Paisley Abbey** BMG

**Faithful, if ultimately pointless, recreation of a timeless classic.**

Released in 1982, Simple Minds' fifth album, *New Gold Dream (81-82-83-84)*, was the moment the Scottish band emerged from the electronic/art-rock underground to achieve chart success by evolving their sound to embrace emotion, warmth and feel. It remains their aesthetic zenith, a yardstick for both themselves and students of the era.

Recorded live for a one-off performance in Scotland's 12th-century Paisley Abbey for Sky Arts, the show is now transposed from its audio-visual origins to CD and vinyl formats, and downloads for those with a more Zen-like approach to finding space for just one more record. But shorn of the accompanying visuals, this new live reading fails to add anything to an album that's nigh on impossible to improve.

This isn't a criticism of the playing, though. Charlie Burchill's guitar chimes and shimmers elicit reassurance as *Someone Somewhere In Summertime* kicks in and Jim Kerr's rich vocals have weathered the years well. Berenice Scott's nimble recreation of Herbie Hancock's keys on *Hunter And The Hunted* are a delight, but the sense of occasion is diminished without the full context in evidence. **JM**

# STORM DEVA

**Storm Deva** STORMDEVA.BANDCAMP.COM

**Symphonic debut from composer Carollyn Eden and astro-scientist Dr Stuart Clark.**

Creative and romantic partners Carollyn Eden and Dr Stuart Clark met in 2012 at an interactive science theatre event, and first played together in 2017 in the earthy environs of Leicester Square pub The Spice Of Life. But Storm Deva is no whirlwind affair. The duo have put much time and detail into this debut, carefully connecting their shared influences of progressive rock, folk and classical music and engaging John Mitchell as producer.

Eden's strong, expressive soprano and piano work leads each track, from the forceful *Carpe Diem* – which has the merest hints of Ghost and Opeth – onwards. Soon Clark's love of guitar emerges with some deft electric soloing on the title track and *Garden Of Wisdom*.

Throughout, the song stories depict transformation, empowerment and release in dramatic settings of multi-tracked harmonies and orchestration. Kate Bush and Iamthemorning are influences as Eden's vocals flutter and fly on tracks such as *Believing*, but reined in as a chamber ensemble, with faint nods to musical theatre works such as *Wicked*. Ambitious but not overcooked, it's a promising start, at last. **JK**

# TEETH OF THE SEA

**Hive** ROCKET RECORDINGS

**Boundary-pushing electro-rock trio return with waspish sixth LP.**

After 17 years in the field, Teeth Of The Sea have by now established themselves as one of the key players in the UK's experimental underground scene. From their origins as purveyors of noisy space rock/post-punk with proggy overtones, they've honed their sound to arrive at the formidable post-psychedelic electronica of *Hive*.

Some of the songs were inspired by a live soundtrack that the band performed to a documentary about the Apollo missions. *Artemis* is one such piece, its sonar blips and metallic music-box melody emboldened by a cascading fanfare of trumpet. *Get With The Program* is TOTS at their darkest, an alarm siren arpeggio and growling voice asking us, '*How do you feel?*' evoking the panic room of modern life.

The flipside to this is the glimmering synthpop of *Butterfly House*, featuring drowsy, seductive vocals from guest Kath Gifford and some fretboard histrionics, bringing a strong 80s vibe in the best possible way. *Liminal Kin* is a Warp-esque judder of bass and chimes that could be a Radiohead deep cut, while *Megafragma* crackles with nervous energy and intimations of an insect apocalypse. A superbly imaginative set. **JB**

## THAT JOE PAYNE

**Bread And Circuses** THATJOEPAYNE.BANDCAMP.COM

**Former Enid frontman's glossy, 80s-style second LP is a wry feast.**

Named after the Roman term for gaining common denominator approval, That Joe Payne's second full studio album might seem a glossy, sumptuously-produced 80s-style package on the outside, but inside, Payne's sentiment has more bite.

The AOR-ish pop thrills of opener *Falling In Love Is Easy* are slathered in Asia-esque harmonies and cowbell. Things turn darker with *River Run Dry*'s Lil Nas X-meets-Peter Gabriel groove and the diva torch song *My Heart* – lest we forget, Peter Hammill was once called the Shirley Bassey of prog. A twinkling, introspective *Plastic Grass* recalls Taylor Swift with a Supertramp Rhodes twist, before Payne's *Cabaret* side emerges on the high-kicking empowerment anthem *Live The Dream*. It's perfectly paired with *Despite Everything*, a soaring fantasia centred around a relationship with a narcissist.

The sweetest-sounding song is *Fucking Fucked* – the line *'when you are bent over/you might find your four-leaf clover'* raising one of many laughs – before the title track pulls out all orchestral and harmony-led stops for a Beatlesy, sweeping finish full of *Pride*. A colourful, confident and class act. **JK**

## VVON DOGMA I

**The Kvlt Of Glitch** VVONDOGMAI.BANDCAMP.COM

**A wonderfully zany synth/prog metal experiment from the ex-UneXpect bassist.**

Canada's UneXpect were a striking avant-garde metal group, so it was inevitable that ex-bassist Frédérick 'ChaotH' Filiatrault would go on to lead his own eccentric band. Vvon Dogma I's debut LP is a resourcefully hectic and bizarre trip reminiscent of his prior project, as well as artists such as The Dillinger Escape Plan and Devin Townsend.

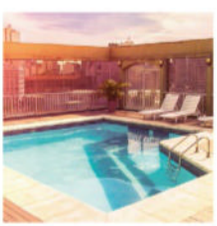
VDI immediately establishes an infectious hook of aggressive rhythms, intricate guitar work and dystopian cyberpunk themes via opener *The Void*. It's an ever-changing theatrical assault that rarely lets up, and fortunately, the quartet are able to sustain that core gimmick in innovative ways during the rest of the journey. *Tabula Rasa* is a definite highlight due to its mesmerising synth patterns, whereas *Day Of The Dead* is complemented by poignant textures, interlude *Hivemind* is nightmarishly industrial, and both *Hurt* and *Triangles And Crosses* are compellingly dynamic and melodic.

Throw in an unexpected take on Radiohead's *2 + 2 = 5* and *The Kvlt Of Glitch* is a wholly inventive ride that's sure to please fans of daringly abrasive and unconventional music. **JMB**

## ZAHN

**Adria** CRAZYSANE

**Never mind the concept, check out the sounds.**



Much like the proverbial tree and how much noise it may or may not make collapsing if no one is there to hear, can an instrumental album hold up if it comes accompanied with or without a concept?

Zahn, a German supergroup of sorts containing members of Heads and Muff Potter, would have us believe that this, their second album, is inspired by European camping vacations and the arduous journeys experienced. Not that any of that comes through the music, a thrilling collision of post-rock, electronic throbs, krautrock, noise rock and, as suggested by the potentially mythical concept, a distinct sense of mischief.

What works in *Adria*'s favour is the sheer scope of ideas spread over its 11 tracks. With its gently floating synth hovering over a gloriously distorted bass guitar, opener *Zebra* might suggest an easy experience but the 11-minute epic *Faser* soon kicks such fanciful notions into the long grass. Drawing on the repetition favoured by their antecedents, it soon explodes into aural violence while *Schmuck*'s denouement is every bit as shocking as it is thrilling. Concept or not, *Adria* stands proudly on its own terms. **JM**

# EXPERIMENTAL PROG

Ambient, electronica and oddities through the monocle of **Jo Kendall**.

He's sought-after as a contributor to records and live shows by a diverse range of famous acts such as St Vincent, kd lang and Roseanne Cash, but for his own debut album, *Memorial* (Colourfield), Californian musician **Rich Hinman** showcases trippy ambient jazz on his instrument of choice, pedal steel. It can still have a country edge (*Buddy*), but also be easy listening (*Sky Lounge*), immerse itself fully in sound FX-filled electronica, as on the title track, or pluck around with the wily Page & Plant-affiliated Section string quartet (*The Raising Of A Large Barn*).

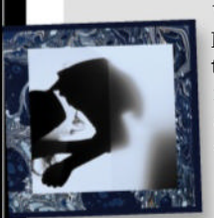
Sheffield-based saxophonist-sound artist **Hervé Perez** turns live online improvisations into work permanently available on his Bandcamp page. There are 12 previous installments already up there; the latest, *Nada #13* (nexttime.bandcamp.com), sees Perez mixing electroacoustic extemporisations with field recordings taken from the natural world for a mindful, meditative listening experience reflective of the season. It really is quite a lulling/balancing exercise.

Following 2018's excellent *Cylene I*, **François J Bonnet & Stephen O'Malley**'s *Cylene II* (Drag City) develops their metallic ambient instrumental pieces further. The shifts here aren't as glacial as in O'Malley's celebrated avant-garde doom band Sunn O))), but instead stately, as on *Ghosts Of Precognition* or the black metal-like *Troisieme Noire*. Immersive, sonorous concrète vibrations from two masters of soundscaping.

**William Eggleston**'s saturated snapshot aesthetic leapt out of the Pop Art movement of the 60s, documenting day-to-day southern American life. (Unfamiliar? See the cover to *Radio City* by Big Star.) In 2017, the then-78-year-old artist released his first album, *Musik*, comprised of off-kilter but melodic synthesiser improvisations recorded in the 80s. Things have moved a little quicker since then, and his follow-up, *512*, is a calmer set, Eggleston's gentle piano style thoughtful and dreamily evocative next to sax and fiddle, with Brian Eno on board to help land *Improvisation* in a familiar *...Airports* setting.

Bringing the noise are **New Age Doom & Tuvaband** and their collaboration *There Is No End* (We Are Busy Bodies). Here the Vancouver metal duo meet Norwegian indie vocalist Tuva Hellum Marschhäuser for an avant-garde, ethereal and jazzy release that veers from the bombastic raga of *In The Beginning* to the sleepy trip-hop crunch of the titular final track.

A perfect fit for spooky season, New York composer's **Lea Bertucci**'s *Of Shadow And Substance* (Cibachrome Editions) consists of two tracks. On the first, *Vapours*, Italy's string ensemble Quartet Maurice improvise around the title concept, tipping into breathing and hysteria, which is, frankly, bloody terrifying. The eponymous second track ramps up the drama in a much creepier way, phantom thuds, piano drone and harp teases further scaring the bejesus out of us then fading away. *Prog* might sleep with the light on for a few months now, ta.



# PETER HAMMILL

## In A Foreign Town/Out Of Water 2023 ESOTERIC

**Two mid-period PH gems reborn.**

If Peter Hammill has taught us anything over the years, it's that his songs should always be regarded as works in progress. With an astonishing number of solo albums under his septuagenarian belt already, not to mention the entire Van der Graaf Generator catalogue, prog's most prolific rebel has little to prove. Instinctively focused on whatever his wayward creative urges will do next, he has rarely looked backwards, preferring instead to let old songs grow and mutate through live performance.

> **He hauls some of his most polarising work into the 21st century.**

These new, re-recorded and reworked versions of two mid-period classics travel along similar lines, as Hammill gently hauls some of his most polarising work into the 21st century. Released in 1988 and 1990 respectively, *In A Foreign Town* and *Out Of Water* are hardly outliers in the Hammill discography, but thanks to the influence of what was then new technology, both suffered from a certain sonic inelegance; with clunky drum machines and chintzy synth sounds proving a distraction from the brilliance of the songs themselves. More than 30 years on, Hammill has allowed himself some revisionist studio tinkering, and the results are glorious: a vivid, three-dimensional update, with significant elements of the original records retained, but with new vocals and instrumentation, and a more rounded sonic identity.

Perhaps the biggest surprise here is how painfully relevant many of the songs on *In A Foreign Town* have remained. A dark and edgy six-minute sprawl, *Hemlock* is Hammill at his most vitriolic and incensed, as he rails against Cold War-thinking and the eternal spectre of war. Sparse and creepy on the original album, it has lost none of its furious bite and is more pertinent than ever here: *'The Earth is flat and pigs can fly/Swallow hard and believe the lies,'* 2023 Hammill spits, clearly more rageful about the state of things than he ever was in 1988. Similarly, anti-Apartheid polemic *Sun City Nite Life* (*'It's a rich man's world/Kick those beggars and fools'*) and the languorously seething Tory takedown *Smile* (*'A smile has set upon this land/Ooh, a selfish grin of ignorance'*) hit home with renewed power, particularly given their newly full and broad sonic values. *Time To Burn*, a tribute to Hammill's late manager Tony Stratton-Smith, is profoundly poignant, even in its album-ending instrumental form.

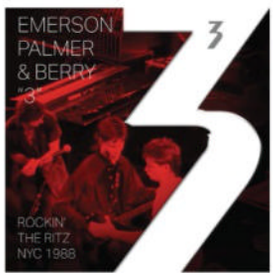
*Out Of Water* was a less clunky and more band-orientated album than its predecessor, but it still benefits hugely from Hammill's revamp. In particular, new takes on opener *Evidently Goldfish* and devastating finale *A Way Out* outstrip the originals' impact by some distance. Two great albums, deftly transformed.

**DOM LAWSON**

# EMERSON PALMER & BERRY: 3

## Rockin' The Ritz: Live 1988 ROCKBEAT

**Vintage live album from the two-thirds of ELP.**




Carl Palmer has described the short-lived 3 project as a stepping stone to the reunion of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, which can feel like damning with faint praise. The group released one album, *To The Power Of Three*, in 1988, belatedly followed by two live recordings that arrived in 2015 and 2017.

Recorded in New York, *Rockin' The Ritz* is the latter of those two, now making its debut on vinyl with new cover artwork. It was originally released as a two-CD set and the transition to a double LP format required the trimming of two songs. It's revealing that the tracks that failed to make the cut, *Runaway* and *Lover To Lover*, were original 3 compositions from their 1988 album, rather than any of the better known and more beloved ELP material.

The studio album was very much a product of its time, with 80s hard rock production and songwriting, and those qualities inform the live presentation of the music. Palmer has no bottom, resonant heads on most of his drum kit, an approach which was all the rage at the time but that sucks most of the tone out of the drums. Palmer is such a powerful player that his drums are always punchy and loud, it's just a shame they don't possess warmth or depth.

The album doesn't seem to have been remixed and remastered for the vinyl release, which is a missed opportunity. It's not a great mix: Robert Berry's bass lines are often swamped by Keith Emerson, whose keys dominate the sound, and the three instruments don't feel comfortably bedded in together. There's no excess tinkering in post; Berry hits some dud notes in *Eight Miles High*, all left untouched by Auto-Tune. Emerson regularly steals the show, impressing with his performance of Alberto Ginastera's *Creole Dance* and letting rip in *Hoedown*.

The band are clearly enjoying themselves, although this is unlikely to supplant *Welcome Back My Friends...* as anyone's favourite ELP-adjacent performance. **DW**

# CYNIC

## Uroboric Forms - The Complete Demo Recordings SEASON OF MIST

**Prog metal pioneers revisit their earliest adventures.**

Originally released in 2017, *Uroboric Forms* brings together all the demos made by Cynic prior to their eventual signing with Roadrunner Records and releasing their landmark debut album *Focus* in 1992. Formed in Florida in 1987 by singer-guitarist Paul Masvidal and late drummer Sean Reinert, the young band emerged as part of the then flourishing US death metal scene, but with an approach that gradually set them apart from their peers.

Even as precocious teenagers, Masvidal and Reinert were aiming high. Nonetheless, the band's first two demos – *'88 Demo*, which was recorded on a boom box while the band were still at high school, and 1989's *Reflections Of A Dying World* – are rough and primitive affairs, at least by Cynic's latter-day standards. Audibly influenced by Chuck Schuldiner's pioneering extremists Death, but with a Voivod-like quirkiness that hinted at bolder aspirations, songs like *Extremes* and *Once Misguided* bear little resemblance to the cerebral rush of *Focus*, but in death metal terms Cynic were already several yards ahead of the pack.

By the time of *'90 Demo* and *Demo 1991*, Masvidal's innately adventurous songwriting had blossomed into something extraordinary. Cynic assimilated elements of jazz fusion and ultra-intricate art-metal into their sound, resulting in highly evolved death metal fare like *Uroboric Forms* and *The Eagle Nature*, both of which appeared in refined form on that epoch-mashing debut two years later.

These early versions lack the production gloss and meticulous precision of their *Focus* counterparts, but the febrile creativity and remarkable virtuosity that informed those later recordings are more than apparent here too. Meanwhile, songs that never made it to albums like *Thinking Being* and *Cruel Gentility* neatly plug gaps in Cynic's evolution from metal kids to cerebral mavericks. This is the perfect, elucidatory companion to this year's *Focus* rejig, *ReFocus*, as a result. **DL**

## KING CRIMSON

**Music Is Our Friend** PANEGYRIC

**Final show from progressive rock leviathans captured in all its glory.**

If discipline has always been important to Robert Fripp, a man who sticks rigidly to a quotidian cold shower regime, then responsibility is also high on his priority list. Toby Amies' penetrating *In The Court Of The Crimson King* documentary from last year revealed Fripp's exacting standards are partly in response to audience expectation, which can only mean pain for King Crimson's constituent members. "I actually like having some major hard-arse making it as good as it can be," admitted drummer/keyboard player Jeremy Stacey during the film.

*Music Is Our Friend* is pretty much as good as a live recording can be. Captured during Crimson's seemingly final show at The Anthem in Washington DC in 2021 and released as a CD bootleg, it's getting a limited edition three-LP upgrade. It's an exhilaratingly taut execution of some of the group's most noteworthy material. With the tour beset by problems, postponements and one band member being winched off to hospital in a helicopter, it only adds to the ecstatic sense of relief at the denouement. North America, too, is not a bad place to conclude things should this really be the final curtain.

From the audio vérité of the 1975 live album *USA* to this three-LP set, North America has been good to King Crimson, offering up key members like Adrian Belew and the ever-durable Tony Levin. Moreover, the outsider's perspective of prog as a genre assumes an insider's proficiency of European scales and so forth, though King Crimson were always more convincing than most sliding indecorously into the blue notes of American jazz, a fact hammered home here on the intro of *Neurotica* and during the reinstated middle section of *Larks' Tongues In Aspic Part II*. The instrumental break in *21st Century Schizoid Man* (the first and last song ever played by King Crimson across the Atlantic, incidentally) is truly transcendental, even with an extended drum solo somehow wedged in there. Major Hard-Arse no doubt took the night off after this one. **JA**

## MCDONALD AND GILES

**McDonald And Giles** PANEGYRIC

**Inaugural '71 curio from former Crimson co-founders.**

It took under a year for King Crimson's original line-up to progress from formation to implosion. Their success was so swift that they'd neither time nor motivation to bend to each other's differing artistic ambitions, so they split.

Multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald and drummer Michael Giles' next move was to recruit the latter's younger bassist brother Peter to record the unfussily titled *McDonald And Giles*. Essentially a Crimson lite album – rich in invention, but lacking their old band's intrinsic darkness – *McDonald And Giles* is often dismissed as a footnote but is easily the equal of Crimson's first entirely M&G-free album, the jazz-rock-infused *Lizard*.

*Suite In C*, a pastoral song cycle that revolves around the Canterbury-tinged baroque pop accessibility of its 'Turnham Green' section, a Steve Winwood keys cameo parachuted in from Traffic's *John Barleycorn Must Die* and actual strings and brass.

*Flight Of The Ibis*, echoing the melody of *Cascade And Cadence* (released the previous year on Crimson's *In The Wake Of Poseidon*) follows, an ethereal Floyd-alike love song that unintentionally showcases the elder Giles' unique, unmistakable drum style, before decidedly pretty, percussion-free acoustic bon-bon *Is She Waiting* lights the way to album highlight *Tomorrow's People*. With an opening segment redolent of *Studio 69*, Alan Hawkshaw's punchy *Dave Allen At Large* theme, *Tomorrow's People*'s sax-driven groove breaks down into a much-sampled (most famously by the Beastie Boys in *Body Movin'*) drum figure one imagines clattering through Tony Visconti's subconscious as he set to work on T.Rex's *Electric Warrior*.

Closing 22-minute, six-movement epic *Birdman* employs Beach Boys-inspired à capella before perking up, jazzying out and ultimately – and satisfyingly – concluding in weary reflective resignation that predated Roy Harper's *When An Old Cricketer Leaves The Crease*. A period piece, perhaps, but prog's l'age d'or was a period without peer. **IF**

## GREG LAKE

**Magical** MANTICORE RECORDS

**Epic seven-CD box celebrating the prog legend's solo endeavours.**

It seems remarkable that Greg Lake — one of rock's classiest, most regal-sounding singers, and a man who was a match for any one of the genre's greats — made just two studio solo albums before his sad passing to pancreatic cancer in 2016 at the age of 69. As *Prog* Editor Jerry Ewing points out in his detailed sleeve notes for this extensive box set, Lake knew that anything he recorded was unlikely to stand shoulder to shoulder with the masterful LPs he made with King Crimson and ELP; works that were part of the very fabric of prog's late-60s/early-70s reign. Indeed, if Lake felt his muse had gone AWOL, he was perfectly content to down tools, "remain silent", and turn his attention to family life in rural Dorset instead.

> **The most fascinating tracks are by his pre-fame bands.**

*Magical* has plenty to cherry-pick from all the same. Lake's brief stint replacing John Wetton in supergroup Asia; his ace, 1975 Yuletide critique of commercialism, *I Believe In Father Christmas*; his, on the face of it, unlikely recordings with AOR giants Toto, and his fleeting *Ride The Tiger* project with keyboardist Geoff Downes — these and many other Lake ventures are thoughtfully plundered, revealing his considerable breadth as a singer, songwriter, bassist and guitarist.

Featuring both *Nuclear Attack* — the Gary Moore penned/propelled riffer, which flagged 80s fears of mutually assured destruction — and the extraordinary coup that was *Love You Too Much*, Lake's roots-rock co-write with Bob Dylan and Helena Springs, Lake's eponymous 1981 solo album material is a highlight. *Magical* also teases out his longstanding gift as an acoustic balladeer, hence various live takes on ELP classics *C'est La Vie* and *Lucky Man*, and a cover of The Beatles *You've Got To Hide Your Love Away*.

The esteem in which Lake's talent was held by his contemporaries is reflected in the line-up of Ringo Starr's All-Starr Band he toured with in 2001 — it also featured Supertramp's Roger Hodgson, Mott The Hoople's Ian Hunter and Prince's favourite drummer, Sheila E. Yet some of the most fascinating tracks here are by Lake's pre-fame 60s bands The Shame and Shy Limbs, both of whom dealt in more-than-decent pop-psych.

Wonderful, too, that disc four, part subtitled *Deeper Into The Mine, An Official Greg Lake Bootleg*, has Gary Moore bringing rip-roaring fusion energy to ELP's *Fanfare For The Common Man*. And even if Lake and Toto's *You're Good With Your Love* sounds like some long-lost US sitcom theme from the 80s, it grooves mightily. All told, this is a worthy tip of the hat to the great man.

**JAMES MCNAIR**

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# MUSE

## Absolution: XX Anniversary Edition WARNER

**Teignmouth trio's apocalyptic rock epic gets the box set treatment.**

Muse's third album was released in the midst of internal and external turmoil, and it shows. The conspiracy theory-incubating horrors of 9/11 coincided with the band being dumped by US label Maverick. The album that emerged, *Absolution*, swung between liberation, paranoia and tinfoil-hatted delirium.

Where its predecessor, *Origin Of Symmetry*, had ramped up the ambition and guitar heroics in the wake of whey-faced debut album *Showbiz*, *Absolution* strapped everything to a rocket and blasted it all off into space. Yet epic tunes such as *Stockholm Syndrome*, the dizzying *Hysteria* and the high-kicking *Time Is Running Out* are still underpinned with an existential dread that was all too earthbound.

*Absolution* is epic in every respect except length. The longest track here is *Butterflies And Hurricanes*, five minutes of crashing piano chords and spiralling riffs. But what tense, nervous ballad *Sing For Absolution* and pocket-rocket *The Small Print* lack in duration, they make up for in grandeur. If only the same thing could be said for the deluxe version of this 20th-anniversary reissue. While the packaging is impressive – three silver vinyl LPs and a couple of CDs housed in an embossed box with a 40-page book – the musical contents are less essential. The original album is accompanied by a measly 11-track bonus disc featuring a mish-mash of early versions and less-than-stellar live tracks. Devotees may be happy with a piano/vocal take on *Apocalypse Please* or a live rendition of *Endlessly*, but it doesn't add much to the myth of an album that deserves mythologising (the fact that the music is duplicated across the CDs and vinyl LPs doesn't help).

Of more interest is writer Mark Beaumont's in-depth essay in the hardback book, not least for Matt Bellamy's confession that he "lost my mind" in a conspiracy theory rabbit hole. Whether that makes it worth throwing down upwards of £100 for the whole thing is between Muse die-hards and their bank managers. **DE**

# NEKTAR

## Remember The Future: Expanded Edition ESOTERIC

**Fiftieth-anniversary reissue for underrated triumph.**

Nektar's fourth album is unlike any of their others. In their 70s heyday they were generally a pretty good jam band, swerving between prog, space rock and psychedelia. Englishmen who formed the group in Hamburg, they sometimes even got misidentified as krautrock. Yet in 1973 they experienced a surge in popularity as *Remember The Future*, a concept album involving extraterrestrials, a blind boy and something about profound human enlightenment, entered the Billboard Top 20 and wowed floating voters. They never quite matched it afterwards, but a photograph of Ian Curtis, pre-Joy Division, wearing a Nektar T-shirt, meant their fade from fashion was leisurely and dignified.

*Remember The Future* is essentially one continuous 36-minute piece of music (split over two sides). More melodic and accessible than other tripper, twitchier Nektar stuff, its refrains and motifs drift in, out, around and back again. It's almost the platonic ideal of a progressive rock album of the era, in that everything flows, every switch-up, rise or fall fits seamlessly within the whole. There are spells of beauty and of fire. Harmonies are diligently crafted to emulate Crosby, Stills & Nash, but the rock-out sections let rip and fly. There's even an undercurrent of gentle wah-wah funk at times, and until the very last minutes, where it succumbs to the urge to growl instead of purring, it's unerringly delightful and very close to exquisite.

The concept is entertainingly bonkers, but it's indisputable that in its save-the-environment message it really did, uh, remember the future. For its half-century, it returns as a well-curated four-CD/Blu-ray package offering new surround sound and stereo mixes, which tidy up the crispness, enhancing rather than simply fiddling with the original. There's a German live concert from 1974 (where they mainly play other material, though *Part One* gets a run-through), and video content including two *Whistle Test* work-outs. An underprized classic of the genre. **CR**

# MAGMA

## Une Histoire De Mekanïk - 50 Years Of Mëkanïk Dëstruktïẁ Kömmandöh PROPHECY

**Seven-LP box celebrates 50-year-old Zeul classic.**

When Magma's third album was released in May 1973, the UK charts were dominated by new titles from Alice Cooper, David Bowie, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Gilbert O'Sullivan. That fact stands as a stark reminder of just how alien and experimental the French collective's music was. While their cult following may have broadened in the 50 years since its release, the album's brooding strangeness remains defiantly undiminished. Both then and now, there's still nothing beyond the sonic worlds created by drummer and founder Christian Vander that sounds quite like it.

> **Without a doubt, it's a thing of beauty and quality.**

This limited edition seven-LP box may not be cheap but it's immensely satisfying, containing eight performances, six of which appear on vinyl for the first time. It's packaged with a huge flag bearing the Magma logo and, more substantially, a 12-inch by 12-inch hardback book filled with archive photos, record company PR sheets and copious press clippings with a majority hailing from the French music papers. Without a doubt, it's a thing of beauty and quality.

Away from a specially remastered edition of the studio version, *Mëkanïk Dëstruktïẁ Kömmandöh* comes vividly to life as it assuredly moves from being a work in progress on the earliest live recording from 1972 to a mature opus in a previously unreleased recording from 2021, evidencing the music's evolution as each incarnation performs it.

Perhaps the most extreme example comes on the fourth LP, given over to two different performances, the previously unreleased *Les Voix De Magma* from 1994 and 1995's *Babyaga La Sorcière*. Side one has a choir backed only by Simon Goubert's propulsive grand piano. Despite the stripped-back setting, the melodic and rhythmic fuel driving this work burns just as fiercely as on the flip side where a vast children's choir, massed brass, wind and percussion sections combine to remarkable operatic effect. Eschewing the Wagnerian overtones, the fifth LP, recorded in 2000, leans more towards a jazz-rock vocabulary as bassist Phillipe Bussonnet and guitarist James Mac Gaw delight in some fretboard fireworks.

Each LP stands as a testimony to Christian Vander's inspired creativity, ushering in a living, breathing composition whose mantric repetition runs through it like some rogue mutating code or magical incantation. With every single disc teeming with a cathartic jubilance, the answer to the question as to whether seven versions of one piece might border on overkill is resolutely and resoundingly no.

**SID SMITH**

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## SPOCK'S BEARD

### Feel Euphoria INSIDEOUTMUSIC

**Expanded 20th-anniversary reissue of the D'Virgilio-fronted seventh album.**

The first in a series of vinyl reissues of albums released by the Nick D'Virgilio-fronted incarnation of Spock's Beard, this 20th-anniversary edition of the band's seventh album takes the form of two weighty LPs, retaining the original running order and adding two bonus tracks from the original limited special-edition CD.

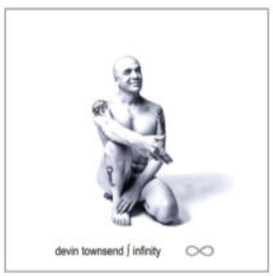
*Feel Euphoria* itself marked the start of a new chapter for the US band. With the departure of frontman, keyboardist and main songwriter Neal Morse in 2002, Spock's reached for an internal solution: elevate drummer D'Virgilio to lead vocalist and immediately head to the studio. Released less than a year after their former frontman's swan song *Snow*, *Feel Euphoria* was a fresh start and a message of reassurance for disconcerted fans. Shaking things up from the start with the decidedly un-Morse-like opener *Onomatopoeia*, a snarling, hard-edged rocker, the band embrace newfound freedom. A long-term songwriting partnership was established between non-musical members Stan Ausmus and John Boegehold, and the band themselves turn in exceptional individual performances. There's experimentation with sounds and approach – Alan Morse's guitar solo on fan favourite *Ghosts Of Autumn* sound unlike almost anything he'd done before and there's a prominent synth-bass during the intro to the multi-part suite, *A Guy Named Sid*. If there was any scepticism about this new version of the band, *Beard*, the lengthy instrumental at the heart of *East Of Eden, West Of Memphis* and the climaxes of *Judge* and *Change* sections of *A Guy Named Sid* demonstrate that this band could be as bold, borderline transcendental and progtastically glorious as they ever had.

As a proof of concept for a Neal Morse-less future, *Feel Euphoria* stands as a heartening success. Subsequent albums would arguably be more consistent in quality and a touch more coherent, but the band's resilience and willingness to take big risks still deserve respect two decades later. **GMM**

## DEVIN TOWNSEND

### Infinity (25th Anniversary Edition) INSIDEOUTMUSIC

**Townsend's soul-baring blueprint remastered and expanded.**




The cover for this 25th-anniversary edition of Devin Townsend's third solo album tells a story. Replacing the original nude shot of the younger artist – nervous smile, hunched over, lean but losing his hair – is a modern update where the now bald-and-proud Canadian sits upright, looking buff and assured after a lifetime's journeying.

Townsend's grappling with devils (and angels) is well-documented and when *Infinity* was released the artist was moving from his frantic, extreme metal persona of Strapping Young Lad to a more progressive plane, although still fuelled by a bevy of loud guitars. Pop, ambient and experimental soundscapes had been introduced by 1997's *Ocean Machine: Biomech* LP but, according to Townsend, not taken seriously. The process was a struggle and without a label to release it, Townsend created his own.

By this time, Townsend was unwell, and a bipolar diagnosis and hospital care led to *Infinity*, and a pathway to survival. A blueprint for Townsend's dualities in preference – loudness and quiet, light and darkness, euphoria and despair, stupidity and enlightenment – *Infinity* shone like no other in the prog metal firmament, and Townsend's production chops were sharpened. It was an extraordinary, widescreen listen then as it is now, and quasi-classical at times – as on the overture, *Truth* – with Ligeti, Glass and Handel referenced in tracks such as *Soul Driven Cadillac* as well as crime jazz on *Bad Devil* and Primus/Zappa on the super-annoying *Ants*.

Revisited for its jubilee, demo tracks have been added from the *Christeen* EP. *Om* is insistent and bouncy, *Sit On The Mountain*'s a beefy pop tune and *Processional* a throat-shredding, 11-minute cosmic rock opera. *Love-Load* is an electronic ADHD headbanger thankfully moderated by the acoustic *Sister* and *Hide Nowhere*, and the 1996 demo, *Man*, the latter three available on *Infinity*'s 2000 deluxe edition. While these are interesting to hear, though, *Infinity* has continuity enough in itself. **JK**

## YES

### The Yes Album: Super Deluxe Edition RHINO

**Prog icons' third album gets a belated 50th-anniversary celebration.**

Even without the whistles and bells that come with this expanded box set, *The Yes Album* occupies a special place in the band's venerated canon. It's a snapshot of the growing maturity of both the nascent prog scene and Yes themselves, as evocative of the era as an army greatcoat.

Originally released in 1971, it was Yes' third album. The band's first two records had been respected but not loved and that changed here. *The Yes Album* is one of those rare records

> **Each member marvels at their bandmates' virtuosity.**

where the listener can feel the wind in the performers' hair, each member marvelling at his bandmates' abilities and virtuosity. Conventions and track lengths were challenged, yet there was an economy in their excess, with everything kept on point and pretty much flab-free. It's a world away from the over-reach of *Tales From Topographic Oceans*, released just two and a half years later.

Where its two predecessors, *Yes* and *Time And A Word*, were the sound of a band seeking a sound, this was truly the start of Yes' great adventure. New boy Steve Howe may have replaced original guitarist Peter Banks, but he slotted in perfectly with new bandmates Jon Anderson, Chris Squire, Bill Bruford and Tony Kaye. All five had earned their spurs sweating and toiling away on the London club scene: the music they made together was the imagined sound of America's west coast filtered through Soho and, in the case of Anderson, Accrington.

This belated 50th-anniversary edition bulks out the original release with Steven Wilson's latest Atmos mixes, as well as his impressive, and fascinating, instrumental mixes. There's also a disc of rarities — including edited, extended and mono versions of existing tracks. But it's the disc of unreleased live material that truly captures the excitement of this line-up of Yes in full flight, not least the half-dozen tracks recorded at the Yale Bowl in New Haven, Connecticut in July 1971, where Yes were apparently opening for Grand Funk Railroad. The musicianship here is off the chart, testament to the connection these five travellers had.
"It's nice to play in front of so many people, I'll tell ya that," says Jon Anderson, in that inimitable Lancashire accent.
"Have a good time with Grand Funk," adds Steve Howe, the model of English politeness.

Crowds that size would soon become commonplace for Yes, as *Fragile* and *Close To The Edge* propelled them to stardom in the US and back home. But while *The Yes Album* remains the gateway to something far more intricate and detailed, it stands as a celebration of the directness and magic of the band that made it at that precise point in time.
**DARYL EASLEA**

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## QUEENSRŸCHE

**Ross Halfin** RUFUS PUBLICATIONS

**Visual chronicle of a band building their empire.**

This photobook from veteran rock photographer Ross Halfin captures the Seattle prog metal pioneers in all the pomp and glory of their heyday. The images span roughly a decade, from the permed and crimped 1980s through to the earthier *Promised Land* era circa 1994. However, the bulk of it is focused on the period of their twin peaks, *Operation: Mindcrime* and *Empire*.

While the images aren't strictly chronological, they effectively chart the band's rise from hot prospects to arena headliners. There's a broad mixture of shots, including some particularly spectacular, colour-drenched onstage photos, alongside portraits and candid moments. There are reminiscences from original members Geoff Tate, Chris DeGarmo, Michael Wilton and Eddie Jackson; former band managers Peter Mensch and Cliff Burnstein; tour manager Howard Ungerleider; and producer Peter Collins to provide a broader perspective.

But this isn't a biography. It's a showcase for Halfin's work that celebrates the creative partnership between the band and the photographer, and a reminder of that glorious period when Queensrÿche had the world at their feet. **DW**

## SOFT MACHINE: EVERY ALBUM, EVERY SONG

**Scott Meze** SONICBOND

**Softs' back catalogue summarised.**

It's been 17 years since Graham Bennett's Soft Machine biography, *Out-Bloody-Rageous*, was first published so this book, chronicling their studio output from 1968's psych-pop debut up to 2023's *Other Doors*, should be welcome news.

Sadly, it turns out to be a very mixed bag. The workmanlike descriptions of the music itself appear limited and cursory with the author's assessments sometimes contradictory and confused. The Mike Ratledge-penned *Teeth* aside, the rest of 1971's *Fourth* is dismissed as being forgettable, filler, and, in the case of *Virtually*, "a failed experiment", which the author then argues isn't really an experiment at all, because it doesn't match his own expectations of composer Hugh Hopper. Some of his other judgments also appear wilfully contrarian. Describing the joyous bursts of melodic tension and release underpinning Mike Ratledge's beautifully executed soloing during *Block* from 1973's *Seven* as "another organ scribble" suggests the impression the writer had somewhere else to be.

Ultimately, all of this is Scott Meze's personal opinion but Soft Machine's music, both good and bad, deserves something more insightful than what's on offer here. **SS**

## WISH YOU WERE HERE: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF PINK FLOYD

**Richard Houghton** SPENWOOD BOOKS

**A front-row view of Floyd's career, from beginning to end.**

With the key events in Pink Floyd's career detailed, dissected and analysed countless times over, fresh perspectives are hard to find. But this updated version of Richard Houghton's 2019 book *Pink Floyd: I Was There* takes a simple yet effective tack: speak to those who saw the band at various points in the career.

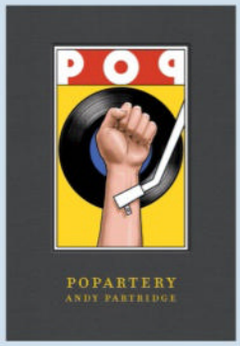
Houghton admits there are gaps in the chronology, though he's tracked down more than 400 people who witnessed them over the decades, starting with a March 1966 show at the Marquee Club (for which they changed their name from The Tea Set to The Pink Floyd) to the last time Waters, Gilmour and Mason shared a stage, during a 2011 Waters show at London's O2 Arena.

For every big event (The 14 Hour Technicolour Dream, Syd Barrett's last gig, the shows in Pompeii and Venice 18 years apart), there are dozens long forgotten, such as Barbecue '67 (held in a tulip bulb auction hall in Spalding, and considered to be the first rock festival) or the *Animals*-era gig in Cleveland where the band threatened to leave the stage because fans were refusing to let go of the cable that held the inflatable pig, Alfie. A vivid, fascinating alternative history. **DEV**

## POPARTERY

**Andy Partridge** PANEGYRIC PUBLISHING

**Book of ex-XTC man's art is as vibrant as his music.**




"A glutton for visuals from an early age, I must have soaked in stuff from every source," writes Andy Partridge, discussing one of his paintings here. Indeed, his art is generally a riot of strong shades, with the colours turned up to 11. As such, his painting to illustrate the XTC classic *This Is Pop*, clearly influenced by Peter Blake, uses emphatic reds and yellows to embolden an image of an arm mainlining music, playing on the word "needle", addicted to the sounds a seven-inch single can make. With his senses working overtime, Partridge's 122-page high-quality book offers a collection of 56 such graphic watercolours, inspired by his songs, accompanied by his thoughts and observations.

> **He's not reinvented the wheel, but is having fun spinning it.**

The project is a chance spin-off of his 2016 book *Complicated Game*, which saw Partridge hand-painting a cover for each copy of a limited edition. He soon realised he'd undertaken a massive task, but grew to enjoy it immensely. Each work was postcard-sized, but is here reproduced at double those dimensions, which boosts their clarity and impact. As for the songs chosen, he states that this doesn't mean they're his favourites, but that they're the ones that clicked with something within his adopted painterly muse.

Thus what he describes as "this insane colour whirl" embraces the happy and sad, the pensive and energetic, in a manner comparable to the various thrusts of his music. *Rainbeau Melt* was the first he tackled, and gives us a pleased-looking toucan sharing a double rainbow from the paint pots he carries and spills. Lively and madcap, it's an effective mission statement for the book's contents. There is perhaps something of Marc Chagall in all these assertive colours and floating, flying, dreamlike background characters. Equally, the more direct pop art images borrow unapologetically from Americans Roy Lichtenstein and Jim Dine, and Brits Richard Hamilton and Joe Tilson. If it sounds pretentious to cite such references, it'd be naïve not to acknowledge their influence. Partridge isn't claiming to have reinvented the wheel; he's simply having fun spinning it. The results are very enjoyable.

There are darker hues in such pieces as *1000 Umbrellas*, where a big sign unambivalently reads "Misery Ahead", and *Red* — "I was young and I was angry" — co-opts Munch's *The Scream*. Yet a feeling of play, rather than introspection, dominates overall. *Easter Theatre* is cheekily rude, *Jumping In Gomorrah* fuses Cab Calloway and Satan, and *Then She Appeared* explicitly honours Alan Aldridge. Skylarking with style, Partridge has acquitted himself productively and pleasurably here.

**CHRIS ROBERTS**

# Take a bow

# ROGER WATERS: THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON REDUX

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| VENUE | THE LONDON PALLADIUM |
| DATE | 08/10/2023 |

Great gig... from the sky!

A side from a few nods, *Prog* has always been disappointed that, since London Palladium's recent incarnation as one of the best gig venues in Europe, more artists haven't really pushed the fact they're playing there on a Sunday night. Not so Roger Waters: being Mr Showbiz himself, he trots on in a pink jacket and treats the audience to not only a Bruce Forsyth impression ("Nice to see you, to see you, nice") but also a Max Bygraves one ("I wanna tell you a story"). Waters, of course, is not known for his mirthsome light entertainment, being one of the most controversial figures in popular music. What should be an intimate celebration — the first time he's publicly played a venue of this size in Britain since 1974 (ironically on the tour that put the original *The Dark Side Of The Moon* to bed), and one of only two shows where his new *The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux* version will be performed — is overshadowed by the antisemitic controversy that surrounds Waters. That this takes place on the first full day of the Israel-Hamas war makes it difficult to divorce the horrors of the outside world from the night's performance.

Waters deals with his critics quickly and simply with a curt "Fuck 'em." He then goes on to thank theatre owner Andrew Lloyd Webber for letting the show go ahead despite protests. *Prog* wonders if the impresario has ever heard *It's A Miracle* from *Amused To Death*, but different times call for different allies. After a few heartfelt words for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Waters saunters into four unbilled, sometimes fascinating, sometimes bizarre excerpts from his forthcoming autobiography, allegedly titled *See You On The Dark Side: Memoirs Of A Lanky Prick*. Used to addressing hordes in arenas, Waters sits hunched at a table reading from his laptop, uncomfortable and seemingly unrehearsed.

There are some marvellous details about Syd Barrett and when the fledgling Pink Floyd were Mike Leonard's lodgers at Stanhope Gardens in north London. These are balanced out by a surreal fictional tale of New Year's Eve 1959 in Cambridge, and then one about a duck called Donald befriended by Waters. If this had all been delivered in a punchy 15-minute laff-riot, it would have been fine. At a languorous 45 minutes, Waters seems aware he may have been wearing out his welcome with random precision and his huffy mood permeates. Most of the great comics who have worked that stage have understood the value of timing, leaving a crowd wanting more. His dealing with hecklers ("Fuck off!") shows he doesn't have the off-the-cuff bon mots required for such intimate audiences.

Finally the band come on and play two songs: the powerful *The Bar* — previewed at his *This Is Not A Drill* concerts — with all its

> **"That this takes place on the first full day of the Israel-Hamas war makes it difficult to divorce the horrors of the outside world from the night's performance."**

PRESS/KATE IZOR

"Did you hear the one about the duck named Donald?"

Critics? Not listening!

A revelation: part of Waters' live band.

That's one way to silence those chatting at the back!

trademark minor chords; then redemption arrives in the unexpected inclusion of *Mother*, featuring gospel performer Johnny Shepherd singing the chorus. Gags over, lecture done, new song withstood, the audience — some of whom have clearly crossed oceans to be there — get a brick from *The Wall*, and the theatre roof is raised accordingly.

As the interval beckons, Waters says there will be a 20-minute explanatory film before *The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux* is played. Most of the audience don't need this sledgehammer/nut explanation of the reason we're all here, and it adds to the degree of restlessness. When *...Redux* finally happens, it's superb. The idea of the 80-year-old Waters having a conversation with his 29-year-old former self is a very good one. Simple lighting, with an illuminated prism extended into the theatre roof, and the words of the new passages projected onto gauze are the only spectacle tonight. The band — including producer Gus Seyffert on bass, Jonathan Wilson on guitar and Joey Waronker on drums — are a revelation, but it's the six-piece string section that wins it. Gabe Noel's arrangements are power-charged; they swoop and swing, reminiscent of Jean-Claude Vannier's magnificent work on Serge Gainsbourg's *Histoire De Melody Nelson*.

Roger Waters raises the Palladium roof.

"I'm becoming a luvvie," Waters says as he sashays across the famous stage. The band are drilled to perfection, the simplistic staging is potent, but his memoir reading was as if he'd argued there was no need to rehearse, as he'd wing it. He mentions Harold Pinter, but it's another writer that springs to mind as *Prog* wanders out into the unseasonably warm October evening — Dylan Thomas. There's little chance that Roger Waters will ever go gentle into that good night.

**DARYL EASLEA**

An artist in conversation with his 29-year-old self.

Minimal lighting with maximum effect.

## THE FIERCE & THE DEAD

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| VENUE | THE BLACK HEART, LONDON |
| DATE | 14/10/2023 |
| SUPPORT | IN VIOLET |

There's not much room to manoeuvre in Camden's Black Heart tonight, either onstage or in the less-than-spacious venue itself. The last time The Fierce & The Dead played here was 2018, and *Prog* remembers it was pretty busy back then. Tonight the UK quartet have a brand spanking new album – the excellent *News From The Invisible World* – to celebrate and the mood is very much upbeat.

Before that however, young London quintet **In Violet** cram themselves onto the tiny stage and make a very big noise. It's a potent brew: a dash of space rock here, rocking electronica there. Occasionally they make this writer think of that photo of Ian Curtis in that Nektar T-shirt and wonder what Joy Division might have sounded like in an alternate reality. It's an experimental sound that won't be for everyone, but we've been listening to them on Bandcamp ever since!

**The Fierce & The Dead** are, as you'd expect, in upbeat form. Understandably they play all bar one track from the new album, kicking off with four new songs: *The Start* (we see what they did there!), *Shake The Jar*, *Golden Thread* and the poptastic *Photogenic Love*. They all feature the vocals of bassist Kev Feazey, which give the audience a chance to see how the band have evolved as a live unit now they've been added to the mix. TF&TD have always been able to rock out but tonight is wall-shakingly loud, which means some of the nuance you hear on record is lost in a quite frankly appalling sound mix. But Feazey has a great voice that suits the uplifting and anthemic nature of the new music, even if he does cock up the beginning of *Photogenic Love* forcing a restart. Not that this fazes the band, who are full of their usual self-deprecating wit, sometimes delivered back in that rather witless 'Look at me, I'm a friend of the band' approach always beloved by some audience members.

Oldies such as *Flint* and *Part 2*, both from 2016's excellently titled *If It Carries On Like This We Are Moving To Morecambe*, offer up the more intricate, lengthy post-rock side of the band, as does material from *The Euphoric – 1991* and *Parts 7 & 8*. They also highlight the band's evolution into a musical force with a wider-ranging appeal than when they first appeared with *Spooky Action* back in 2013. It's been a slow-building success story, hampered by hurdles along the way, but both tonight's showing and *News From The Invisible World* point to everything moving very much in the right direction.

They end with the rolling, ebullient *Truck* and depart to equally upbeat cheers. "Next London show will be in a bigger venue with appropriate sound," they announce several days later. Both are required. Then watch them fly!

**JERRY EWING**

## HAWKWIND

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|---|---|
| VENUE | ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON |
| DATE | 29/09/2023 |
| SUPPORT | THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN |

Don't stare for too long – you'll be lost for eternity!

**Arthur Brown** is a national, international and cosmic treasure. Why he's not a Knight Of The Realm, or the Government's official Charismatic Authority/Grand Druid Of Freakdom, is a mystery but he *is* the God Of Hellfire, at least. Tonight, surrounded by Day-Glo mannequin props — and in his trademark facepaint and various sequinned britches, boots and capes — he and his excellent bluesy Crazy World warm up for his long-standing friends and collaborators.

Arthur Brown: truly the God Of Hellfire.

A lithe spirit, Brown navigates his vocal parts near-faultlessly, taking in the *Fire* suite, and, movingly, his beautiful 2007 ballad *Voice Of Love* and Kingdom Come's psychedelic soul epic *Sunrise*. He finishes with a mesmerising *Time Captives*, from 1973's *Journey* album, experimental electronica where Suicide meets kosmische, sparking the cosmoscope to evoke space and time in historical and spiritual senses. Our minds duly blown, he floats off to emphatic cheers.

During the interval, an older gentleman with short back-and-sides in a white shirt and suit plonks himself down next to *Prog*. He introduces himself as Ian, a former student and Ents Officer at Luton College Of Technology in the early 70s. In late 1971 he booked **Hawkwind** for an enormous £750, at a ticket price of 75p when it was "about Lemmy's fifth gig" and in the lead-up to the *Space Ritual* shows. What looked like becoming a disaster when only 200 tickets were sold in advance turned to triumph after 2,000 people showed up.

> **"Even during the extensive jam sections, this incarnation of Hawkwind is arguably the tightest and most dynamic they've ever been."**

The event had quite an effect on him — "DikMik and Del invented techno!" he says — with another element making an impression. "There was this wooden box at the front of the stage, a naked female dancer emerged from it. Imagine the effect on a 17-year-old boy..."

There's no Stacia or Miss Renee dancing tonight and Del, Lemmy and DikMik are long gone. But the stage is adorned with Barney Bubbles' zodiac flags and the stage gear decorated with pyramids and other *Space Ritual* symbolism. The electronic wizard-in-chief is Tim Lewis — aka Thighpaulsandra, previously of the parishes of Julian Cope, Coil, Spiritualized and his own solo work — and he relishes his role as cosmic conductor, ensuring Hawkwind's (rocket)ship is super-tight, injecting some of the proggiest Moog widdle that band has ever had. As a special guest there's EDM and pop maestro William Orbit on auxiliary keys and guitar (although it's hard to discern his parts in the mix), dressed in a tie-dye two-piece and grinning from ear-to-ear, chuffed to be performing with his teenage heroes (Orbit shares west London anarcho-squat roots with the group, before his work with Madonna, U2 et al).

William Orbit: belated teenage kicks.

Magnus Martin brings fiery guitar to the mix.

Doug MacKinnon: Lemmy-like bass.

PHOTOS: CARSTEN WINDHOORST. EXCEPT WILLIAM ORBIT: PRESS/JOHN CHASE

King of the fill: Richard Chadwick.

Tripping the light fantastic!

There's just a light sprinkling of *Space Ritual* tracks — *Born To Go, Master Of The Universe, Welcome To The Future* — in a setlist almost identical to their current tour sounds; a little disappointing given the show's coincidence with release of the mega box set reissue. That said, what power Dave Brock's band display tonight, as dazzling as their whirling laser show.

They lift off with *Levitation* and keep the pulse going through *You'd Better Believe It, The Psychedelic Warlords* and *Spirit Of The Age*. Richard Chadwick is an extraordinary drummer, not just a timekeeper, but expressive with his fills throughout gruelling metronomic workouts *and* handy on vocal harmonies too.

He's the cornerstone to the multiple junctures of Hawkwind manoeuvring a glorious glide to the vanishing points of tracks such as *Rama (The Prophecy)* and *Right To Decide*.

Even during the extensive jam sections and the slower numbers such as *Underwater City* and *Peace*, this incarnation of Hawkwind — buoyed by Magnus Martin's fiery guitar and vocals and Doug MacKinnon's Lemmy-like bass attack alongside Captain Brock's unrelenting rhythm style — is arguably the tightest and most dynamic they've ever been.

Arthur Brown returns to narrate *Ten Seconds Of Forever* — which does seem to stretch to an eternity, breaking the thrilling, propulsive *Brainstorm* in two — but it's a gully in a landscape that's Om rock par excellence, a ritual that's currently *not* to be missed.

**JO KENDALL**

Dave Brock: master of ceremonies.

Thighpaulsandra keeps everything super-tight.

And we have lift-off!

## BRUCE SOORD

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| VENUE | NELL'S, LONDON |
| DATE | 14/10/2023 |

There's a horizontal A4 sign hanging at the foot of the stairs leading up to the snug and tasteful environs of Nell's, a venue in West Kensington that could easily double as a members' club in a 70s crime thriller. Deliberately hung at eye level to make it impossible to ignore, it politely requests that patrons refrain from talking during the performance. A real shame, then, that there's a tiny but vocal minority that choose to ignore it. And – given the introspective nature of the music on offer tonight – more than a little ironic that some of the jibber-jabber emanates from Bruce Soord's own crew, who are asked to tone it down by a couple of disgruntled fans.

Soord himself proves to be a genial host, even if some of his spoken introductions tail off inconclusively and are bailed out with the words, "So I wrote a song about it." That said, the overwhelming majority of the crowd gathered here tonight are more than happy to let the music do the talking and so Soord and his band oblige over the next 80 minutes or so.

The final night of the tour in support of his recently released third solo album, *Luminescence*, is the only UK date after Tonbridge's Walled Garden Festival in September was cancelled. The sense of occasion certainly isn't lost on Soord, who plays with palpable sincerity and, with the set leaning heavily on the new record, it soon becomes evident that the new songs have already embedded themselves into the collective muscle memory. Initially taking the stage alone, the musician gently ushers in the show with the delicate *Instant Flash Of Light*, and it's met with smiles of delight and recognition.

While the songs on *Luminescence* are very much studio creations, here they are given a whole new lease of life thanks to the contributions of The Pineapple Thief bassist Jon Sykes, and drummer Tash Buxton-Lewis. *Lie Flat* expands from its recorded origins with Buxton-Lewis taking the brushes to her kit to add gentle yet insistent beats. For his part, the rounded low-end sees Sykes frequently closing his eyes as if in deep meditation as he allows the music around him to fill both mind and body. Elsewhere, and as on the album, *Rushing, Stranded Here* and *Read To Me* are blended into a single piece of music that's played as a suite, and Soord's ability as a storyteller is the glue that binds the songs together.

The dips into his past are warmly received. *All This Will Be Yours* – inspired, he tells us, by the descent of his neighbourhood into something less than savoury – sees the trio locking in as one, but it's Soord's search for inner calm – witness *Find Peace* – that lingers, regardless of the chitter-chatter.

**JULIAN MARSZALEK**

## L.O.E

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|---|---|
| VENUE | THE TRADES CLUB, HEBDEN BRIDGE |
| DATE | 20/10/2023 |
| SUPPORT | MAEBE |

Storm Babet threatens to make tonight's show, the belated album launch for L.O.E's debut, *The World & Everything In It* a washout. But the droves that make it to Hebden Bridge, despite the weather-beaten travel chaos, show that a bit of rain won't stop northerners from having a good time.

Beneath the venue's arched ceiling, Bristol's **Maebe** amalgamate math, djent and post-rock across an action-packed 30 minutes. Michael Astley-Brown, the brainchild of the project, which is now starting to transition into a full band, leads from the front, his movements as energetic as the kaleidoscopic sounds his fingers conjure. The jaunty math grooves of *Harsh Realm* thrive in the live setting, while *Tautology* offers light and shade via eloquent and dynamic interplay between bandmembers. Atmospheric post-rock flavours sit at the heart of Maebe's songwriting, but it's their delicate seasoning of other sub-genres and styles that makes them so engaging. *You Are The Host Now*, named after the Zoom prompt to a random participant when the host's connection drops, slithers through the venue with an unsettling demeanour. Astley-Brown's playing is often incendiary, but here his minimalist melodies are hugely impressive, adding sweetness to the song's sour tonality. It's a successful first foray up north for the band as they build on their humble beginnings.

One of the most evocative qualities of **L.O.E**'s debut album are the vast array of spoken-word samples that ice their glittering, emotional compositions, but they're sadly buried in the mix tonight. It's hard to appreciate what they're saying and how they complement the music, especially for the uninitiated. It's a credit to the band's performance that it doesn't ruin the evening. *People Like People Like Them* is a tender opener, awash with reverb and hinged on an oxymoronically bleak-yet-sanguine hook that breaks through their wall of sound. *Secret Societies Rule The World* follows, blending a creepy, horror film palette with gilt-edged riffs. It'd be easy to say L.O.E are too absorbed in their playing to be an entertaining watch, however with the sepia-tinted videos that play out behind them, such absorption allows the audience to sink deeper into their music. Consequently, their set – the new album in its entirety – flies by, with the sparkling tapped guitars and oceanic atmospheres of *People Have The Power* and the grizzly, agitated thump of *Lament* illustrating the record's totality. For their finale, they offer a taste of album two in *The Beginning After The End*. It hints at a grittier approach to their philosophic instrumentals, as, sheltered away from the storm that strikes this small Yorkshire town, both bands prove the future of British post-rock is in safe hands.

**PHIL WELLER**

# PROGSTOCK FESTIVAL

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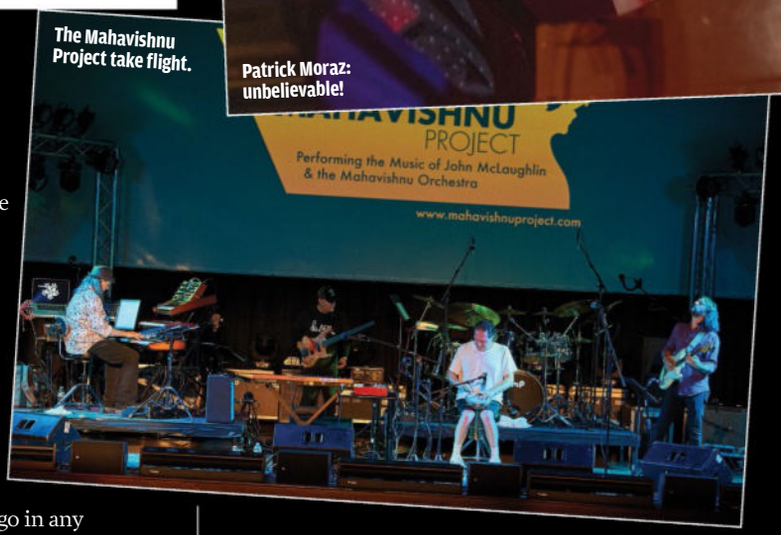
| VENUE | WILLIAMS CENTER, RUTHERFORD, NJ, USA |
| DATE | 06/10/2023-08/10/2023 |

Patrick Moraz: unbelievable!




The Mahavishnu Project take flight.

A music festival is an embarrassment of riches, particularly when it comes to progressive rock. Not only does the attendee have a chance to enjoy several of their favourite acts simultaneously at the same venue, but they're also afforded the opportunity to see and hear others that may not be as familiar. It's the proverbial win/win.

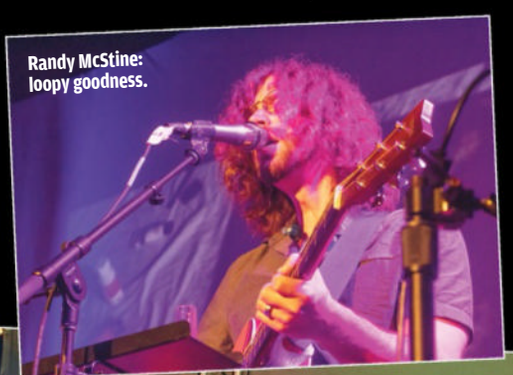
Such is the case at the Williams Center in Rutherford, New Jersey, where artists and fans have gathered for the ProgStock Festival. Here, the music can go in any direction, and chances are it will. For the next three days and evenings, prog fans will revel in the ambitious music form they know and love.

ProgStock 2023's line-up presents itself like a multi-course meal. On Friday, the show opens with New York City groups **Ad Astra** and the **Travis Larson Band**, both of whom offer tasty guitar-based instrumental musings that loosen us up for the ultimate guitar outburst that comes courtesy of the evening's headliner, **The Mahavishnu Project**. They regale us with a recreation of *Birds Of Fire*, currently celebrating its 50th anniversary.

> **"ProgStock 2023's line-up presents itself like a multi-course meal... A three-day dessert!"**

Day two's musical banquet unfolds over the course of some 12 hours. Keyboardist **Erik Nordlander** (Rocket Scientists) knocks us out with a solo performance, followed by **Aziola Cry**, a Chicago-based instrumental trio led by the touch guitar work of Jason Blake. Their performance proves to be one of the highlights of the weekend.

The middle set features **Randy McStine**, who's fresh from his recent gig with Porcupine Tree. He performs solo with the aid of loops and other effects that accompany his soaring singing voice.



Randy McStine: loopy goodness.

Rachel Flowers: a solo treat.

McStine then joins the **Matt Dorsey Band**, who are up next. Dorsey's set is full of fervour and enthusiasm that keeps the audience completely engaged.

The final sets of the day belong to multi-instrumentalist/vocalist **Rachel Flowers**, who treats us to a solo keyboard performance, and **Dave Kerzner**, who plays material from his new album, *Heart Land Mines Vol. 1*, before he and his band launch into the entirety of *Dimensionaut* by Sound Of Contact, which celebrates its 10th anniversary. While the music doesn't duplicate the album per se, it is still remarkably well executed

DAVE KERZNER, THE MAHAVISHNU PROJECT AND LINTOPIA: GREGORY RAWRYSZ. RANDY MCSTINE, RACHEL FLOWERS, PATRICK MORAZ, MYSTERY, DAVE BAINBRIDGE AND SALLY KINNEAR: CEDRIC HENDRIX.

Unitopia and Chester Thompson see us into the night.

thanks to help from Dorsey, McStine and guitarist/bassist Fernando Perdormo. The audience are highly receptive and greet each tune with enthusiasm. It's a nice way to wrap up the evening.

Sunday's meal is served in the form of the duo of **Dave Bainbridge and Sally Minnear**, who provide soaring vocals accompanied by stringed instruments, keyboards and percussion. Canadians **Mystery** might just help us cope with the loss of Rush from the concert stage. The band's power and passion connect with the audience in fine fashion. The main course is a solo performance from acclaimed keyboardist **Patrick Moraz**, whose wizardry is displayed by moving deftly from piano to synthesisers at any given moment. The set can be perfectly described by his favourite word, "Unbelievable!"

Bainbridge and Minnear soar.

ProgStock comes to a close with a passionate set from Australia's **Unitopia**, who are accompanied by drummer supreme Chester Thompson. He plays in a most subtle and tasteful fashion, almost the opposite of his boisterous work with Genesis and Frank Zappa. The band play well into the wee hours before sending us home stuffed and more than satisfied.

Festivals like ProgStock offer the perfect opportunity for fans of the genre to gather in solidarity, share experiences, buy lots of merchandise, meet and greet the artists, and take in the work of artists they might not otherwise get to see on tour. Even the technical glitches that temporarily bring the final set to a halt before it could start don't dampen the crowd's enthusiasm. It's a satisfying meal indeed. In fact, it's a meal that could be viewed as a three-day dessert!

**CEDRIC HENDRIX**

Mystery: helping to fill the void left by those other excellent Canadian proggers.

Dave Kerzner and his band take us to another Dimension(aut).

## BRIDGET ST JOHN

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| VENUE | CAFÉ OTO, LONDON |
| DATE | 15/10/2023 |
| SUPPORT | EMMA TRICCA |

Before tonight's concert *Prog* overhears an audience member saying that while he hadn't heard much by Bridget St John, she'd come from an era of great music. Indeed. St John was part of a 70s UK folk scene that produced a huge amount of invention and spawned many hybrid forms. When she recorded for John Peel's Dandelion label in the early 70s, the DJ rated her as Britain's best female singer-songwriter. To proggers she might be familiar for her collaborations with Kevin Ayers (*Shooting At The Moon*) and Mike Oldfield (*Ommadawn*).

Following 1974's *Jumblequeen*, she moved to New York, and her releases have been sporadic. Tonight's set includes some more recent songs, one of the most compelling being *The Hole In Your Heart*, written in response to 9/11, and she sings it wonderfully, climbing up through the melody's wide intervals. St John has often been compared to Nico, due to the breathy depth of her voice, but it sounds a tad lighter now. Her guitar work is dextrous and flowing and she's a charismatic performer, drawing us into her world. She pays tribute to three of her late friends and "brothers in song", singing Nick Drake's *One Of These Things First*, a gorgeous version of John Martyn's *Back To Stay* that she recorded on her 1971 baroque-folk masterpiece *Songs For The Gentle Man*, and *Rabbit Hills* by Michael Chapman, whom she recorded with on his 2017 album, *50*.

In support is the UK-based Italian singer-songwriter **Emma Tricca**. It's a simpatico pairing, sparked by NY engineer Ernie Indradat, who'd worked with both musicians. An introduction led to the women meeting, swapping ideas and booking a small tour. Tricca's set is short and sweet, her guitar style also reminiscent of Chapman and Drake and her voice, although tidily enunciated, is a velvety jazz-folk mezzo reminiscent of Billie Holiday that the audience leans into to catch each word on songs such as the waltzy *Devotion*, the bluesy trill of *Julian's Wings*, and the Simon And Garfunkel-like *Lost In New York*. Tricca's latest album, *Aspirin Sun*, has abstract textures and psychedelic effects added, particularly the 10-minute stand-out, *Rubens' House* (recalling a visit to the painter's stunning Antwerp home). Tonight that's stripped away, but the track, with its busy arpeggios offset by dreamier passages, is just as eerie and hypnotic.

Tricca returns to the stage to duet with St John on her own composition, *Rubies* – which she wrote years ago with St John in mind, and was recently recorded in New York with Indradat – and remains for the closing *Ask Me No Questions*. Their harmony singing and guitar styles work so well together that a full-blown collaboration should be encouraged, or even demanded.

**MIKE BARNES, JO KENDALL**

# SUMMER'S END FESTIVAL

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| VENUE | THE DRILL HALL, CHEPSTOW |
| DATE | 04/10/2023-06/10/2023 |

Chepstow, along with large parts of the UK, is currently bathed in unseasonal temperatures in the 20s. It's just the kind of late summer boost everyone needs, although the repercussions for an audience of prog fans gathered together in a building erected in the early 1900s, when construction made a mockery of today's flimsy efforts, and air conditioning was merely the draught that would blast through an open door, are, to say the least, somewhat stifling.

Summer's End '23 is not only bathed in sunshine, but a cheery bonhomie too. The bar and kitchen do brisk business all weekend and there's someone selling an excellent record collection and sharing the profits with the organisers (and from which *Prog* relieves the vendor of a hefty slab of 70s pomp rock obscurities). It's this sense of community that truly makes these weekends so special for those attending, both regulars and newbies, of which we're seeing more and more.

**Maer**, the project featuring Cellar Darling's Anna Murphy and Iamthemorning's Marjana Semkina, kick things off on Friday evening with their first-ever live performance. They play both singles released to date, *Sister* and the recently released *Poisoned Waters*, and both are quite delightful. The singers' voices combine beautifully, the backing musicians adding a dark prog-tinged folkiness to their sound, and they leave everyone wanting more. Which is what **Iamthemorning** give them in a set that touches upon all the duo's releases and features Semkina dancing around the stage as live guitarist Liam McLaughlin adds bite to their compositions, which are driven by Gleb Kolyadin's stunning piano. **Cellar Darling** are a heavier proposition, although more folk prog meets heavy rock and definitely not metal. Sometimes Merlin Sutter's thunderous drums threaten to overshadow the finer musical moments, exemplified by Murphy's acute musicianship and soaring vocals, but ultimately it's the light and shade the band offer, such as on the epic *Dance*, that offers something richly satisfying. They'll have made plenty of new fans tonight.

> **"The sense of community truly makes these weekends so special for both regulars and newbies, of which we're seeing more and more."**

Rare is the occasion that any act suffers unduly at Winter's or Summer's End, but Saturday's openers, Dutch symphonic band **Realisea**, are dreadful. Whether they're under-rehearsed or simply not very good, they really miss the mark. You'd expect better from Silhouette frontman Brian de Graeve, but his vocals are frequently as off as Rindert Bul's guitar sounds, while the far better vocals of Marjolein de Graeve are used far too sparingly. Their woe is compounded by the fact that **EBB**, following, are excellent. There's always one band that grabs the audience at these events and makes it their own; The Emerald Dawn and Ghost Of The Machine, for example. And now it's the Scottish proggers' turn. Presented by our friends at Progzilla Radio, the sextet are both fun and enthralling, not least with the visual representations of vocalist and spoken-word artist Kitty Biscuits, and driven by Erin Bennett's passionate vocals and driving guitar. They are *the* band of the weekend. By contrast Dutch prog metal quartet **Day Six** are probably the heaviest act of the day, and by no means bad, but they just don't have the impact of EBB.

David Cross needs little introduction to prog fans, having played on some of King Crimson's finest albums, and tonight he and the **David Cross Band** perform 1973's *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* in full. Indicative of Crimson, it's not always easy on the ear, certainly compared with some of Cross' band's own tunes, although we should be grateful it's not *Lizard* they'd opted to play, but guitarist and vocalist Jonathan Casey shines. As for headliners **Karnataka**, *Prog* was left somewhat unmoved by the band's appearance at last year's Winter's End, but here, standing in for Oliver Wakeman, they're almost a different band. It helps being able to draw on talent like Luke Machin (guitar) and Rob Wilsher (keyboards), but it's vocalist Sertari who holds the show together now. Oozing a confidence missing last year, possibly

Maer make their live debut...

David Cross, Lark-ing about.

EBB find their flow, with great style.

IMAGES: CHRIS WALKDEN

...And merge into Iamthemorning.

Cellar Darling (loudly) drum up support.

Day Six provide some heavy weight.

Karnakata rule the stage.

Folk, anyone? Hands Of The Heron oblige.

Third Quadrant: welcome 80s throwbacks.

Comedy Of Errors show us who's (Hugo) boss.

thanks to having her first album with the band, *Requiem For A Dream*, under her belt, she's in total command on the Summer's End stage and it's quite a sight to behold.

On Sunday the organisers throw everyone a delightful curveball with the delicate and intricate music of **Hands Of The Heron**. The all-female trio from Bristol are the perfect tonic to ease the audience back in for another day full of music. It's largely folk, but clever enough to appeal to a room full of proggers and delivered with a gentle grace and humour that means everyone loves them.

**Third Quadrant** are expectedly louder, but no less engaging. There's a charming story here of a band originally formed in the 80s and who regrouped in 2012, reflected brilliantly in the cover of a CD they hand to *Prog*, showing the current line-up outside their local on the front, and their youthful counterparts in the 80s standing outside the same pub! Their music captures a certain time and spirit and hits exactly the right spot for a Sunday afternoon.

**"Threshold are slick but not flash, fun but not showy and a fitting end to another great weekend."**

**Galahad** profess to being nervous before they make another Summer's/Winter's End bow. The band are about to release an excellent new album, *The Long Goodbye*, and surely have enough appearances at this festival under their belts, but as Stuart Nicholson points out, it's actually their first gig since lockdown. You wouldn't know it, however. From the minute they spring into *Alive* it's more than clear that Galahad are on it. It's a pretty modern set, given the band's longevity, with nothing predating 2006's *Empires Never Last*, from which we get the title track and *This Life Could Be My Last*. They're two of the shorter songs in an epic-laden set from which *The Last Great Adventurer* and the particularly emotive title track of the new album really stand out. By the time they close with an uplifting *Seize The Day*, it's a proper party atmosphere.

Big finish: Threshold.

**Comedy Of Errors** can't quite maintain Galahad's momentum but the Glaswegian sextet are on familiar ground and their melodic neo-prog acts as an ideal buffer between Galahad's storming set and the rocking prog of Threshold to come. Vocalist Joe Cairney is probably the first musician at Summer/Winter's End to perform clad in Hugo Boss, and there's a sophistication to the band's sound that delights the audience.

And so UK prog rockers **Threshold** close the evening with an assured set not dissimilar to their O2 Academy Islington show back in May. It's slick, engaging and fun. Singer Glynn Morgan cuts an increasingly assured figure while guitarist (not to mention producer of choice) Karl Groom and bassist Steve Anderson throw the shapes. Behind them drummer Johanne James is a blur, while keyboard player Richard West is an assured figure. It's a classy showing, slick but not flash, fun but not showy and a fitting end to another great weekend.

**JERRY EWING**

Galahad bounce back with their first post-lockdown show.

## TOOL

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | EMPIRE POLO CLUB, INDIO, CA, USA |
| DATE | 08/10/2023 |

Tool have come a long way from the alt-metal agitants that emerged from Los Angeles in the early 1990s, but the provocateur spirit still looms large as they take the stage at California's Power Trip festival. After three days of bells-and-whistles rock'n'roll from some of the planet's biggest rock and metal bands – in near 40-degree heat, no less – ponderous, meditative prog might not be everyone's cup of tea, but certainly makes for a transcendent experience amid the mountain and desert views.

"You smell delicious," intones frontman Maynard James Keenan in a rare conversational moment. Otherwise, Tool are all anti-rockstar bullshit. Spotlights highlight guitarist Adam Jones, bassist Justin Chancellor and drummer Danny Carey, while Keenan looms in the shadows behind, his Mohican giving the impression that Stripe from horror movie franchise *Gremlins* has had a growth spurt.

But it's not just the band the eyes are drawn to. A kaleidoscopic extravaganza cast across the giganto screens of the Power Trip stage make it feel like the TARDIS has been left unlocked as the musicians come juddering to life with *Jambi*, while *The Pot* teases a massive singalong early on as Keenan's voice is joined by a chorus of several thousand. *Fear Inoculum* bathes everything in ominous red light, concentric shapes and gigantic eyeballs falling just short of a full-blown psychedelic freakout as the band grow ever-more intense.

As though sensing he's onto something resembling commerciality, the vocalist switches gears. *Rosetta Stoned*'s account of meeting aliens on LSD becomes hyper-charged with incoherent paranoia, while blinking drones flying overhead make it look like ET himself couldn't resist swooping in for a closer look.

Then the *real* laser show begins. Slipping into the well-worn path of meditative grooves and dexterous melodies, notes are twisted and stretched to breaking point as though fed past an event horizon. *Pushit* might explode with sudden fury, but *Forty Six & 2* and *Pneuma* are practically glacial, Tool embracing their inner Pink Floyd fanboy for an audio-visual spectacle that is somehow both indulgent and resplendent.

With the motor-starting riff to *Invincible*, Tool re-tether themselves to the earthly plane for a final, insistent stomp around the stage, the grooves of *Stinkfist*, *Swamp Song* and *Ænema* showing they can play the big rock show game when they want to. But then, why would they? Stacked against the likes of stadium-fillers AC/DC and Guns N' Roses, Tool are aliens on an already rarified field, interstellar trolls of the highest order.

**RICH HOBSON**

# THE FLOWER KINGS

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | DINGWALLS, LONDON |
| DATE | 20/10/2023 |

Hasse Fröberg showcases his impressive voice with Michael and Roine Stolt.

Given that tonight's show is one of only two UK appearances by The Flower Kings – one of the pre-eminent symphonic prog bands of the last couple of decades – since the pandemic, it might be reasonable to expect that this gig would be a hot ticket. However, although the audience is healthy, it's far from heaving, with interested parties including Robin Boult (Tilt, ex-Fish, among others) and Marillion stalwart and TFK guitarist Roine Stolt's Transatlantic compatriot, Pete Trewavas, also in attendance.

With a new album, *Look At You Now* just out and keyboard player Lalle Larsson added to the line-up, they take to the stage and ease both the audience and themselves in with the reggae-tinged *Ghost Of The Red Cloud*, following that up with a medley featuring the cinematic strains and glorious synths of *Deaf, Numb & Blind* and sections from the lengthy epic *Garden Of Dreams*.

The band's musical heart, Roine Stolt.

It's clear the band are experiencing some technical and equipment issues on stage, which continue on and off throughout the show. Being consummate professionals, while mildly irritated by these difficulties (apparently the result of having to use a great deal of borrowed/rented backline and instruments) the effect on their performances is minimal. However, it undoubtedly interrupts the flow and momentum of the set, with perhaps a bit more banter and unplanned gaps between songs than intended – there's almost five minutes of meandering in the middle of the set before launching into *The Dream* and *Day For Peace* from the latest album, for instance.

Unfortunate hitches aside, the band deliver more than two hours of their finely crafted, superlative and often joyous music curated from across their career, including *Big Puzzle* from their 1995 debut album, *Back In The World Of Adventures*, and the mellifluous dynamic pulse of *Beginner's Eyes* from *Look At You Now*. Larsson shines on many tracks – his solo on *The Dream* is terrific and he gets two extended, completely solo spotlights utilising mainly piano that enthral a receptive crowd. Special mention goes to Hasse Fröberg as well, who demonstrates his truly impressive voice particularly when he gets into the emotive refrains of *Church Of Your Heart* and during the magnificent full version of *Stardust We Are*, which closes the main set.

Of course, master of ceremonies and The Flower Kings' musical heart, Roine Stolt, is never less than thrilling on guitar and, although suffering the most from the technical difficulties, he turns in expressive and gorgeous solos throughout.

The title track from *Paradox Hotel* acts as a suitably fulsome and powerful encore and the band take their bows. A show that doesn't go entirely to plan perhaps and, with so much material to choose from, a set that can only ever scratch the surface of their impressive back catalogue, but The Flower Kings remain a potent force within modern prog.

**GARY MACKENZIE**

> **"A show that doesn't go entirely to plan, but The Flower Kings remain a potent force within modern prog."**

Despite technical issues, The Flower Kings still put on an excellent show.

KEVIN NIXON

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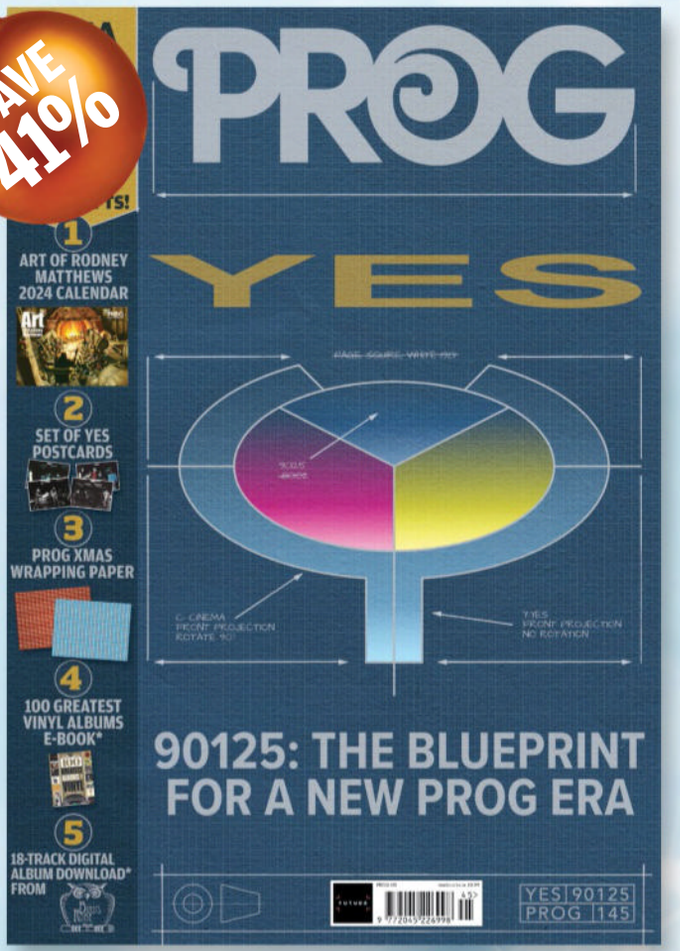


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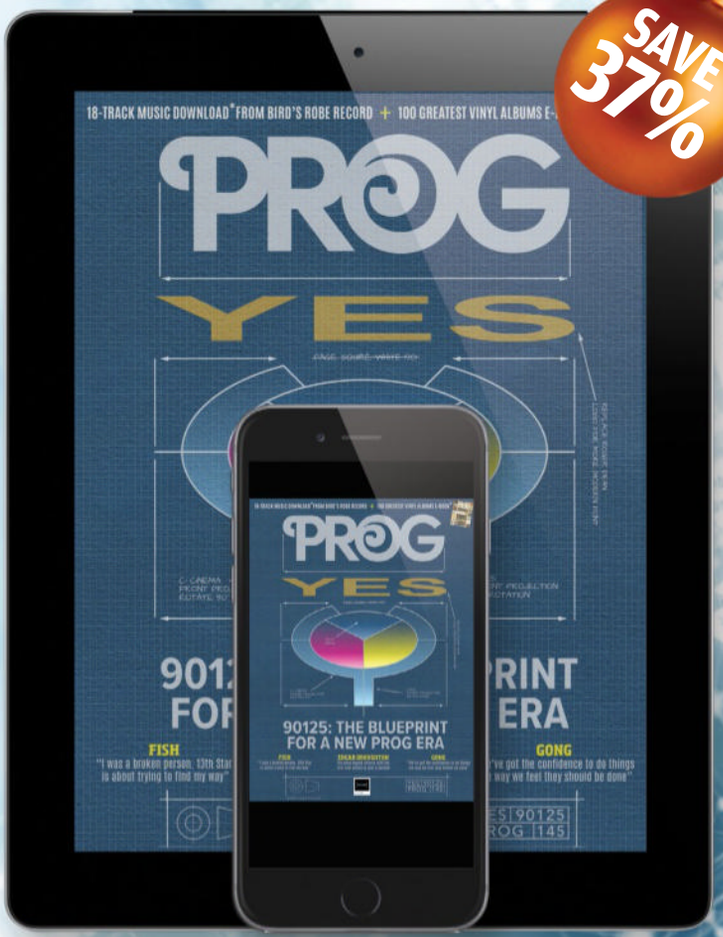


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PRESS/ANDY FORD

# JAMES DONALDSON (TEMPLES ON MARS)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon.**

**Where's home?**
Originally New Plymouth, New Zealand, but now London, UK.

**First memory of prog?**
I found *The Dark Side Of The Moon* in my dad's vinyl collection as a teenager and was obsessed with it for months. I thought I was really blazing a trail as none of my friends had heard it, but found out soon enough that Floyd were one of the biggest prog bands ever!

**First proggy album you bought?**
Well, when I got into music, CDs and cassettes were overlapping, so my friends and I made lots of mix tapes. We were into heavier stuff but Peter Gabriel, Genesis, Marillion, Floyd and Rush all featured in there somewhere.

**And the last?**

*Every Sound Has A Colour In The Valley Of The Night* by Night Verses. We opened for them at their London show in February 2020. They sold the place out and totally ruled their instruments.

**Your first proggy gig?**
Tool in Wellington, 2002, in support of their *Lateralus* album. Blew my fucking head off!

**The best gig you've ever seen?**
Meshuggah at Download Festival, 2018. In terms of sound, sheer tightness and musicianship it was face-melting. I was standing just in front of the sound desk and was just like, "Wow!" I'll never forget that set and the feeling it gave me.

**Your latest prog discovery?**
Bantamweight are a duo from LA that our guitarist Gerald [Gill] introduced me to. They've only released a handful of singles so far, but are very cool.

**Any guilty musical pleasures?**
I love a bit of Pet Shop Boys!

**What's your favourite venue?**
I love the O2 Arena in North Greenwich as a spectator, and the dream is to play a show there one day.

Guilty pleasure: the Pet Shop Boys.

MIKE PRIOR/GETTY IMAGES

Not pants: Maynard James Keenan.

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

**Prog hero?**
Maynard James Keenan. He's had high-quality creative output for so many years, over a range of outlets, and he maintains an excellent work ethic. He also knows how to cook, make wine and wrestle!

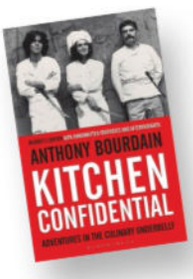
**Outside of music, what do you enjoy doing?**
Cooking, spending time with my family, walks in the country. I try to go to the gym three times a week and run at least twice. Being a dad to young boys, singing and moving around on stage requires a base level of fitness. I also love watching rugby.

> Tool was my first prog gig and they blew my head off!

**Ever had a prog-related date?**
I took my wife to see Tool. Does that count?

**What the most important piece of prog music?**
I'm going to go with Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Sure, there are bands that define the genre more as a whole, but this is one huge slab of prog rock that's known the world over.

**Tell us about a good book!**




Back to my fascination with the culinary world: Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential*. An oldie but a goodie!

**The prog muso you'd most like to work with?**
Drummers are awesome, and I've loved Josh Freese [A Perfect Circle, Devo, Nine Inch Nails] since forever. I was lucky enough to work with him on some tracks a while back and would definitely like to do it again, but I think he might be a bit busy with the Foo Fighters right now!

**Which prog album gets you in a good mood?**

*Sound Awake* by Karnivool. Right from the opening notes of *Simple Boy*, which has the dirtiest bass line and drum beat. A very classy record.

**Your favourite prog album cover?**
Tool's *10,000 Days*. The glasses and 3D artwork concept – simplicity and genius all at the same time.

**Finally, what are you up to at the moment?**
Getting ready for Temples On Mars' last show of 2023, at Ampliyuletide Festival in Gloucester, December 16. And we're *finally* organising the last bits for the release of our second album. Such a long process, but we got there in the end!

*See www.templesonmars.com for more information.*

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